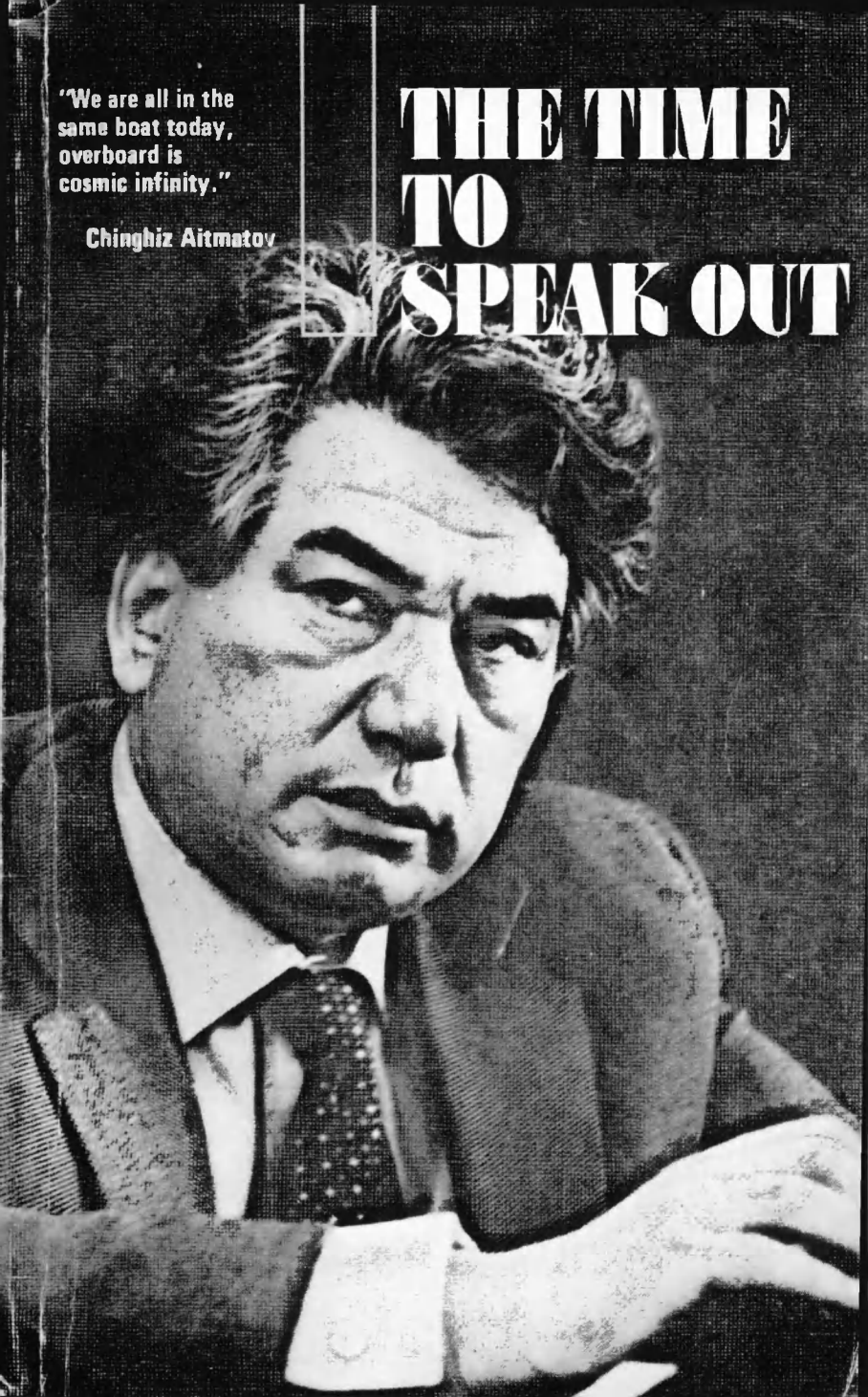
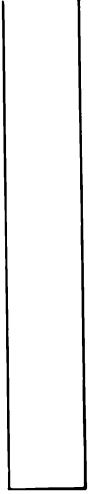
"We are all in the same boat today, overboard is cosmic infinity."

Chinghiz Aitmatov

THE TIME TO SPEAK OUT





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CHINGHIS
AITMATOV

THE TIME TO SPEAK OUT

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I. ABOUT THE TIMES AND MYSELF

A RESPONSIBILITY TO THE FUTURE

Since earliest times people have been telling a story about themselves. Since earliest times this story told in songs, fairy tales, books, music and plays in various languages and dialects has really been about one and the same thing: the fate of humankind, different people, their work and dreams, their virtues and vices, struggle and wars, duty and conscience, the beauty of women and men, love and separation, birth and death; in short, about everything that is part of life. Throughout history people have always hungered for this story.

As time goes on, people have a growing desire to understand themselves, the present and the past. As time passes they increasingly manifest their passion for art, demanding of the artist more honesty, more wisdom and insight into the human soul while lauding talent and rejecting inaptitude. This endless quest for the artistic perception of life is one of the basic qualities of human beings that distinguish them from all other life forms. Hence there can never be an end to the story about ourselves; hence all the problems of literature are based on the problem of human beings.

In this respect Soviet literature continues the initial story by people about people, continues—on the basis of experience of the generations—along the same path to understanding the infinite beauty and infinite contradictions of the world. It carries on the best traditions of literature in our country and the world that were accumulated throughout the history of cultural development and in all endeavors for freedom and progress.

At the same time, we Soviet writers realize clearly that our objectives are also different, special and even exceptional due to the enormous change in the foundations of the social world outlook, the new principle of human existence on which the Soviet socialist system has been based for half a century.

Soviet literature developed on soil that was ploughed

up thoroughly by the revolution. Hence the long-standing problems of humanism, good and evil, the individual and the collective, civic responsibility and philanthropy—the big and small problems comprising the substance of artistic endeavor—had to be dealt with by Soviet literature in a new light. Their revolutionary and, as history showed, their truly human significance had to be analyzed. Books by Soviet writers presented a historically new individual—the working person, the hero of the new era who is inspired to transform society. This hero was a product of the 20th century freed by the revolution, the same person whose fate writers of the past had pitied as they mourned the great human strength that had been suppressed by centuries of violence and injustice.

Soviet literature showed the world the truth contained in the new society and the new individual. This truth did not have an easy birth. When contemplating the times and ourselves, looking back on the path traversed by the country and the people, you cannot help but see that the most valuable achievement of the revolution is the people it gave birth to and nurtured. They had the good fortune to live in a complicated and dramatic era, cross many insurmountable passes in history, but the struggle strengthened them, motivated them to constructive historical creativity and taught them courage and dignity.

The revolution, its renovating force and dramatism shown through the personal stories of individuals is, in my opinion, the main theme of Soviet art. I do not want to speak lightly of our accomplishments: after all, the victories were won at great cost. The unparalleled figures testifying to economic growth, cultural development and higher living standards in the past fifty revolutionary years should be expressed in the language of fiction.

I have always been deeply interested in the lives of those who work the land, the farmers. I believe that the life of the people is best reflected in contemporary literature in stories about the countryside which has undergone radical changes since the establishment of Soviet government. These changes are especially evident in recent years because the government is constantly concerned about the problems of agriculture, is tirelessly seeking ways to improve life in the countryside and encourage widescale initiative among the people. This activity which has already produced many important results is alien to complacency; we have many problems yet to solve. We must constantly analyze the experience of both

the past and present... As a writer it is precisely this aspect of modern activity, our practical work and life of the people, that I find of greatest interest.

Nothing in our literature could be more contraindicated than self-satisfaction. After all, Soviet literature not only registers the positive changes in life and our advance toward our cherished goal, but also is called upon to study social development through the lives of people, shows what tremendous human effort is required to establish anything new. However, I did not immediately see these as the objectives of literature.

The writers of my generation began their careers in the difficult postwar years; our first books came out within six or seven years after World War II. As teenagers, our generation had suffered the hardships and grief of war. The war against Nazi Germany had affected our growth and development. It had enriched us with complex and distressing experience and, as time went on, it gave us a certain advantage over younger writers. As any generation of writers, the young had their own pluses, but sometimes they lacked practical knowledge of life's difficulties.

What did we learn from writers of the older generation? During the war Soviet literature was in the front lines with the soldiers, stimulating patriotism and helping to defeat nazism and its ideology. In the best war novels of the early postwar years, writers who had fought in the war—impressions of those heroic years teeming in their minds—recreated with great artistic force the unprecedented heroic feat of the people. These books contained the harsh truth of life and patriotic pathos.

But the war was over and life went on. The country faced new, difficult tasks and problems, yet there were almost no literary works that portrayed the postwar reality with the same force and depth, that were artistically innovative. Books often painted a glowing picture of life at a time when people still felt so acutely the consequences and disasters of that destructive war, when grief lived in every home and every family. Of course, such books that did not deal with the people's main problems, the complicated problems of the times, could not teach us future writers either the exalted art of comprehending the truth or genuine craftsmanship. But it would be dishonest to say that we young writers at that time perceived the poverty of such books that merely illustrated hackneyed truths and were based on

primitive plots and cliches. At any rate we were not always able to distinguish these works from serious literature, such as Leonid Leonov's *The Russian Forest* which had already been published.

My first stories and sketches appeared in the early 1950s. They were imitative works that had little to do with reality. My first story was set in Japan. The second one was about the Volga-Don Canal, especially the dredges which were a frequent subject of newspaper articles in those days. It was from the newspapers that I gleaned the necessary "realia."

I am recalling this to underline the fundamental changes that came about in the consciousness of writers, transformations fostered by the advances in our society and that had quite a positive effect on the future development of literature.

Each one of us knows how much we owe the Communist Party for exposing Stalin's personality cult which stifled people's initiative and impeded the country's normal and natural cultural development. If we want to be truly historical and objective, we must show the enormous scale of work our people accomplished and the emotional stress that they endured with honor. We lived through a complicated historical drama, but remained true to our lofty revolutionary ideals. That is why irresponsible skepticism, doubts about the future and grumbling are absolutely alien to our literature.

The triumph of Lenin's principles and the major social upsurge that occurred after the memorable Party congresses also helped us young writers understand the grand civic objectives of literature and the need to deal vigorously with the problems of daily life. The sphere of life's realities expressed by art was expanded immeasurably. Gradually we began to comprehend the significance of the ethical problems that arise in people's relations with other people and with society, and realized that inculcating morals was a great responsibility and difficult job.

We young writers were forced to think seriously about life and about our vocation by Valentin Ovechkin's sketches, Mikhail Sholokhov's *The Fate of a Man*, Alexander Tvardovsky's *Horizon Beyond the Horizon* and Valentin Tendryakov's novellas.

Literature suddenly took a huge leap forward. The talented works of famous and unknown writers were published.

Many new names appeared. I will not enumerate them all. I will only cite a few writers whose works made an especially deep impression on me (perhaps someone else would name others: thank God there are many to choose from). They were books about the war by war veteran writers of the younger generation—Yuri Bondarev, Grigory Baklanov and Vladimir Bogomolov. They were especially dear to me because we entered the world of literature at about the same time.

The large number of war stories possessed a new quality: the writers wanted to show the difficulties of war. In this respect they were linked with the best books about the war that had come out in previous years. But each period has its own attitude to the past and judges it in its own way. This deeply fruitful and logical process is dictated by the interests of the present and the need to solve important contemporary problems. Yes, some authors did turn upside down our present knowledge about the events of those days without beating around the bush. But that was not, in my opinion, what really defined the pathos of their works. Enriched by the experience of history, they strived to more profoundly analyze this experience, convey it to the reader without imposing any ready answers and forcing the readers to think for themselves.

Many well-known writers seemed to be reborn again—Nikolai Aseyev, Vladimir Lugovskoi, Nikolai Zabolotsky and Pavel Nilin. Young poets and prose writers stirred much controversy. Literature in the second half of the 1950s and early 1960s generally made an important contribution to our political and artistic development.

I did not personally know any of the writers who became famous then, but those of us who lived far away from Moscow kept up with all the latest literature. We argued heatedly about the various ideas presented, and in the process we developed our own viewpoints and creative expression.

I came to Moscow in 1956 to attend Higher Literary Courses.* The upsurge in social awareness stimulated literary affairs. New magazines were published—*Druzhba narodov*, (instead of the almanac), *Yunost*, *Moskva*, *Neva*, *Voprosy literatury*. Old ones were reestablished—*Inostrannaya literatura* and *Molodaya gvardia*. New local magazines came out in republics, territories and regions.

*At the Gorky Institute of World Literature.—*Ed.*

The works of writers of the past whom we hardly knew were printed. That was when I first read the wonderful prose of Ivan Bunin. We filled in the blank spots in our literary education, enriched our knowledge of Soviet literature and its traditions. We also began learning more about the literature of other peoples.

I remember being astounded by the simplicity and power of Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea.* I really liked the works of Polish writers who wanted to get to the bottom of complex socio-psychological processes, show the dramatism involved in the development of a new mentality among our contemporaries.

In 1957 Fyodor Panfyorov, then Editor-in-Chief of *Oktyabr* monthly, published my *Face to Face* in his magazine. This novel was important to me as my chosen path in literature, the path I took when I wrote *Jamila*, published in 1958 in *Novy Mir.* In those days Anna Dmitrieva, an excellent editor and translator who was merciless when it came to inaccuracies and shortcomings, played an important role in my career. I gained confidence in my abilities after talking with Alexander Tvardovsky, reading the extremely friendly and favorable article written by Mukhtar Auezov in *Literaturnaya gazeta*, and after hearing with great pleasure that Louis Aragon had translated *Jamila* into French and had written about it in his book *Soviet literature.*

Face to Face, *Jamila* and other works were based on my personal experience. I knew about the hardships during the war not only on the battlefields, but also deep inside the country. That was when I received my first mail from readers expressing their gratitude; every single letter was a real treat. But I also experienced the other side of literary life. When *Face to Face* came out, some critics in the republic questioned the authenticity of the events portrayed. They said I had "insulted all the Kirghiz people" because one of the characters was a deserter, a traitor to his country, and that just did not fit standard literary practice. They even said that I had exaggerated the hardships, that if the villagers had been so undernourished we could not have defeated the Nazis. They insisted that our people had everything they needed during the war.

Renovating and reviving the nation's cultural life was not, of course, a painless process. Some writers went to extremes, especially young writers, and there were reviewers who were overly critical. But experience

shows that the main direction of our art has always been inseparable from the people and the Party. The great interest in poignant social themes was definitely due to the growing political nature of literature.

We writers felt we had a personal responsibility for people: the Party says that we are all responsible for the future of our country and people's future. This has had a positive impact on the literature of all the Soviet peoples. This has been especially noticeable in the new historical period. Some of the new writers, both members of ethnic groups that have long-standing literary traditions and those that do not, are among the best in the nation and the world in terms of style, honesty, an uncompromising attitude to evil and genuine civic concern. I do not want to cite long lists of writers, but feel I must name Rasul Gamzatov, Mustai Karim, Kaisyn Kuliev and David Kugultinov.

The cross-fertilization of literatures among Soviet ethnic groups has increased. In this respect I would like to mention Mukhtar Auezov who played a major role in developing the prose of Turkic-speaking peoples. He was a talented and cultured man who had enormous interest not only in young Kazakh writers, but also those representing other peoples. Auezov had a major effect on the literature of Kazakhstan and Central Asia, not only by what he wrote, but also by his very personality. He was keenly interested in any new developments in the art of all peoples and, at the same time, loved and respected the ethnic artistic traditions which he knew superbly and created new ones in his excellent works.

In my opinion this is the foundation of genuine innovation—the organic combination of ethnic traditions and the best accomplishments of national and world artistic experience. This is confirmed by the entire history of multiethnic Soviet literature. The innovative qualities of such writers as the Ukrainian Ivan Drach, the Lithuanian Justinas Marcinkevičius, the Moldavian Ion Drutse, the Azerbaijanian playwright Imran Kasumov and poet Rasul Rza of the older generation are evidence of how ethnic and interethnic traditions are woven into artistic endeavors.

I have travelled to many countries and participated in several international congresses. I have seen abroad how racism and chauvinism warps people's thinking, the evil they foster and their serious consequences. I am always thankful at those moments for what we gained from the

1917 October Revolution—ethnic equality, love and respect for one another and the ideas of proletarian internationalism. The solution of the nationalities question in our country on the basic of equality is a circumstance that plays an enormous positive role in the development of literature and culture among all the Soviet peoples.

Things ethnic, as reflected in the arts, stir controversy around the world. The ethnic features of a people give literature its own expression. Literary works are nourished by their link with the writer's native land, people and their most important everyday cares. This helps the writer be of universal interest, because all peoples and their attitudes have so much in common. That is why the individual ethnic considerations should never be counterposed to those of all the peoples. However, sometimes ethnic traditions become canons and are hypertrophied, thus constraining literary progress. After all, ethnic culture is constantly changing.

The period of imitation has ended for young Soviet writers. They are creatively digesting the experience of other literature that follows the traditions of socialist realism common to all. However, some writers and critics still exaggerate the significance of folklore traditions in literature developed in recent history. Kirghizia's earliest prose clearly bore the features of folklore: fairy-tale themes and heroes that personified good or evil, hyperbolic images and static personalities. That was only natural in those days, but mature realism must be different. In this case, when one's own literary traditions are weak, it is especially important to learn from the experience of more developed literature, above all Russian literature. This experience that is creatively adapted helps develop new ethnic literary traditions.

This was my own experience. As a young writer and respresentative of Kirghiz literature that had come into being only since the 1917 Revolution, I faced a serious problem—language. I often hear the opinion that the language of a people recently living in patriarchal-feudal conditions, as was the case of the Kirghiz people, is incapable of conveying the emotional experience of modern people and the complex system of their attitudes to the world and society. I am certain this is not so. A good writer can depict modern life and the complex processes under way in any language. I write my books in both Kirghiz and Russian. Since childhood I have been reading in Russian, both the classics and Soviet writers.

My novel *Farewell, Gyulsary!* gave me, perhaps, the utmost creative pleasure and yet the utmost artistic torment. I wanted its message to be different from my previous works. Reviews and numerous letters from Soviet and foreign readers are a source of not only moral satisfaction, but also force me to think more about life, about the road I have chosen in literature.

I like this novel because I think I was able to portray contemporary life in Kirghizia. I was not striving for ethnic flavor, but wanted to raise the important issues of Kirghiz life, delve into the social conflicts and contradictions.

Still I regard this novel as merely a prelude to a subject I feel is very important. All of us face the task of portraying our contemporary of the 1960s—a complicated person who has a broad view of life, is deeply concerned about all problems of the times and feels a sense of responsibility for the past and the future.

It has long been known that an interest in the past is linked with responsibility for the future. Now we are able to take a new look at the past. I developed a special feeling about the significance of the socialist revolution after important but forgotten truths were restored. The time has come for all of us to realize what we have gained from the event that changed the lives of many peoples fifty years ago. We have not yet found the words to portray the great revolution as it merits. Of course, this portrayal should not be high-flown praise, but insight into the essence of what the revolution has offered our parents and ourselves. I want to write a book that would be largely autobiographical: about my father (he was secretary of the Kirghiz Regional Party Committee and perished in 1937), about myself, our generation, what was special about these generations and their continuity. Our parents were responsible for firsts in everything—the first school, the first schoolgirl, the first academic. Everything was happening for the first time, everything began with the word "first." This gave rise to incomparable enthusiasm. I would like to talk about what has been inherited and developed and what has been lost.

To comprehend the continuity of the times, show the magnificence of our revolutionary traditions, artistically depict our fifty years of experience and in this way more clearly single out the urgent problems of modern social development requires of us writers a sense of civic duty

and revolutionary determination.

A comprehensive examination of the circumstances shaping heroes and their relationships does not at all signify that the best recent literature blames the "environment" for everything. Writers guided by socialist humanism are not only kind to people, but are also demanding of them, because they believe that people can transform the world and themselves. The heroes in books by Soviet writers aspire to affect "circumstances." This, in my opinion, is one of the main merits of Soviet literature.

I have already written and spoken about the educational value of heroes who are spiritually strong, fearless advocates of truth and justice, fighters for our ideals.

Sometimes, however, this principle is regarded simplistically, in purely didactic and standardized terms. Life cannot be confined to any standards, including literary. When we talk about a modern hero we should take a better look around us and not be guided by speculative interpretations, even if such interpretations are used by all our favorite heroes in literature of the 1920s and 1930s.

The level of education and culture of our people has risen. If for no other reason our notion of a hero has also changed. I am attracted to writers who seek heroes worthy of emulation—active, strong-willed and passionate in championing their beliefs. But can we forget that a work of art is influential not only by the direct force of example, but also in more complicated and delicate ways? Take, for instance, the writings of Chekhov.

Humanism and, consequently, the educational role of the art of socialist realism are manifested in a complex and multifaceted way. By defending human individuality and attempting to reveal more fully its spiritual wealth, art is promoting society's development.

Our objective is to educate people to be active in public affairs and well-rounded individuals. I would like to recall what Dovzhenko, Leonov, Paustovsky, Soloukhin and Dorosh wrote about with such passion in their poetry and prose—strengthening people's primordial ties with nature and love for the land. Inculcating appreciation and love for the land of one's birth, for nature, for all living things is also a way of developing individuality, a person's "moral potential."

Ivan Bunin so beautifully depicted nature in the heart of Russia, the cornfields, woods, rain and snow!

Our writers often fail in their attempts to recreate these primordial ties with Mother Nature. Their descriptions are frequently feeble imitations: we do not feel the purity and spontaneity of feelings, the inseparable connection between these descriptions and the writer's inner makeup.

The democratization of our life, the higher living and cultural standards have made Soviet people immeasurably more demanding of art. The educational objectives of literature are becoming more complex. To satisfy the growing demands of our contemporaries, literature must provide more food for thought and emotions, teach every person to think independently, and foster a sense of civic duty. And different artists do this in different ways.

To shape individuality a writer must also possess individuality, be a person of convictions, courage and honesty. Writers should express their own view of the world in their works. Just because writers have similar political ideals does not mean that our inner worlds are the same or that we cannot perceive reality in different ways. A writer's individuality and contemplation of the world are enriched in the complex process of creatively examining contemporary life. While teaching our readers, we are also constantly learning from the people, keenly analyzing the people's intellectual experience of the past and their present needs.

1967

NOTES ABOUT MYSELF

It is rather difficult to write one's own biography for others to read, for publication. It is hard to know what is best: to tell your life story in detail or briefly? If you write a lot people will complain, "Why did he make it so long?" If you write a little they will wonder, "Why did he bother; he didn't say anything interesting." Perhaps it is best not to write one's story at all...

But since I have been persuaded to do this I will give it a try. I am over forty, so I suppose I have something to say about my life.

In my village people had to know their ancestors seven generations back. The elders were strict about this. Usually they tested us boys: "Tell me, now, young man, what clan are you from? Who was your father's father? And his father? And his? What kind of man was he, what did he do and what did people say about him?" If the boy did not know his family tree his parents would certainly hear about it. "What kind of father is he without a clan or a tribe? How can a person grow up who doesn't know who his ancestors were?" Continuity of the generations and mutual responsibility for moral development in one's clan are important. In *The White Ship* I tried to get this message across when the little boy was talking to a driver who had just moved into the community.

I could also start my autobiography by telling you about my ancestors. I am from the Sheker clan which was started by a man named Sheker. My father was Torekul, his father was Aitmat, his father was Kimbildi and his father was Konchujok. That is enough, although I could go on naming people I know absolutely nothing about (no one is left who could tell me something about them). Konchujok was not my great great grandfather's name, but his nickname. All his life he wore shoes made of rawhide and was therefore called Konchujok, which means bootless. So we are from a line of

"bootless" people. It is nothing to brag about, but it is a fact.

All that and what I will tell you later I did not learn from my father. He did not live long enough to get around to it. Besides, he had other more important things to do. I heard these things mainly from my paternal grandmother—Aiimkan Satan-kyzy, and her daughter, my aunt—Karagyz Aitmatova. It is amazing how similar a mother and daughter can be in appearance, personality and spiritual makeup. To me they were one and the same person—an older and younger grandmother all in one. I am thankful that I knew those wonderful women who were wise and beautiful—they really were beautiful. They were the ones who taught me about the old days and our family history.

I never knew my grandfather Aitmat. He died sometime before the 1920s and I was born in 1928 (December 12).

An old millstone still rests in the floodlands of the Kurkureu River at the edge of our village, Sheker, in the Talass Valley of Kirov Region. Every year it erodes a little bit more and sinks ever deeper into the ground. My grandfather's mill was there.

People say he was quite a craftsman. He could sew and was the first person to bring a sewing machine from town. That is how he came to be called Aitmat the tailor. He could also make saddles, do tin plating, solder, play the *komuz* (a three-string folk instrument—*Tr.*), and even read and write Arabic script. But despite his enterprising nature he was a poor man all his life. He was always heavily in debt and sometimes he could not even go herding with the other villagers, simply because he had no sheep.

My grandfather once made a desperate attempt to get out of poverty. He decided to build a mill and make a lot of money. He took everything he and his brother Birimkul owned and invested it in the mill. All summer long the two families dug up a water canal from the Kurkureu to bring water to the mill (barely a trace of that canal is left) and put up walls and a roof. A year later the mill was finally operable. But the unfortunate Aitmat was again unlucky. The mill caught fire and burned to the ground, except for the millstone. Totally destitute, grandfather and his twelve-year-old son Torekul, my father, set off to build a railway tunnel near the Maimak station. With the help of the local Russian management

there, my father was enrolled in a Russian school for Kirghiz children in the town of Aulie Ata, now Jambul.

I have a good reason for telling you all this. If the mill had not burned down, my grandfather would not have worked on the railway and it is unlikely that my father would have attended school in town. Because my father was a literate man in the early years of the revolution (later he went to Moscow twice for studies), he was one of the first Kirghiz Communists, was in leadership positions, was extremely interested in politics and literature, and because my mother, Nagima Aitmatova, was also literate and a modern woman, they introduced me at an early age to Russian culture, the Russian language and Russian literature, of course, children's literature.

On the other hand, I often went with my grandmother in the summers to herd sheep. An extremely charming and intelligent woman, respected by all the villagers, she was a treasure-house of fairy tales, ancient songs, true stories and legends. I experienced nomad life as it had been traditionally. It was not simple migration with livestock from one place to another, but huge ritual procession. It was a kind of exhibition of the best harnesses, the best ornaments, the best riding horses, and the best arranged camel packs. On display were the best young women and improvizational singers who sang songs of mourning (if we were leaving a place where a close relative had died) and travelling songs. I saw these vivid spectacles before they disappeared as the people gave up their nomad life.

Probably without really realizing it herself, my grandmother taught me to appreciate my native language. So much has been said about the native tongue! The wonder of one's native language is inexplicable. Only a native word, learned and understood in childhood, can fill the heart with poetry born from the experience of the people, instill a person with the earliest sources of ethnic pride, give great aesthetic joy in fathoming the multifaceted meaning and significance of the language of one's ancestors. Childhood is not simply a wonderful time of life; in childhood the core of one's individuality is shaped, genuine knowledge of one's native language is developed. It is in childhood that we come to understand our relationship to the people around us, the natural environment and specific culture.

I can say from my own experience that in childhood a person can learn two and maybe even more languages in

depth if they play an equal role in one's life from an early age. In my case Russian is just as much my native language as Kirghiz, native in childhood, native my whole life.

I was five years old when I first acted as an interpreter, and a piece of boiled meat was my first "fee." That was in the mountains where I usually spent the summers with my grandmother.

Collective farms in those days were just being organized. That summer a terrible thing happened at our mountain pasture. A pedigree stallion the collective farm had just bought suddenly died. In the middle of the day its stomach became bloated and it dropped dead. The herders were panic-stricken—the stallion was a valuable one of Don stock that had come from far away Russia. A messenger was sent to the collective farm, and from there another messenger went to the district authorities. A day later a Russian man arrived at our mountain site. He was tall, had a red beard and blue eyes, wore a black leather jacket and carried a map-case at his side. I remember him very well. He did not know a word of Kirghiz and our people did not know any Russian. He had to examine the horse, determine the cause of death and write a report. It did not take the shepherds long to decide that I would be the interpreter. I was standing in a crowd of children who were watching the newcomer.

"Come with me," said one of the men, and took me by the hand. "He doesn't know the language, so you translate what he says and tell him what we say."

I was shy and scared. I slipped away from the man and ran to my grandmother in her tent. A whole bunch of my friends ran after me out of curiosity. In a little while the same man came after me, complaining. Grandmother was always affectionate, but that time her face was strict.

"Why don't you want to talk to the man? Important people are asking for your help. What's the matter, don't you know Russian?"

I did not reply. My friends were outside the tent speculating the outcome.

"What's wrong, are you ashamed of talking Russian, or are you ashamed of your own language? All languages are God-given. Now stop this nonsense. Let's go!" She led me away by the hand. The children followed us.

The tent, where meat was already being boiled to serve our guest, was full of people. They were drinking fermented mare's milk. The veterinarian was sitting with

the elders. He smiled at me and said:

"Come in, little boy, come over here. What's your name?"

I mumbled my name in a whisper. He patted my head:

"Ask them why the horse died," he said as he got out a piece of paper to take notes.

Everyone waited in silent expectation, but I could not bring myself to talk. My grandmother sat there looking distressed. Then one of the elders, a relative of ours, put me on his lap. He put his arm around me and whispered in my ear confidentially and in all earnest:

"This man knows your father. What will he say about us? He'll say the boy isn't being raised well by the Kirghiz!" Then he announced to everyone out loud: "Now he'll talk. Tell our guest that this place is called Uu-Saz."

I began with hesitation: "This place is called Uu-Saz, poisonous meadow." I became more confident when I saw my grandmother, the veterinarian and everyone else in the tent looking so pleased. I'll never forget that simultaneous translation I did, word for word, in both languages. It turned out that the stallion had eaten some poisonous grass. In answer to the question—why hadn't the other horses eaten the same grass?—our shepherds explained that the local horses will not touch it, because they know it is not edible. I translated all that.

The visitor complimented me and the elders gave me a whole piece of hot and aromatic boiled meat. I ran out of the tent looking triumphant. In an instant I was surrounded by the other children.

"Hey, you were great!" they exclaimed. "You talk Russian the way a river flows, without stopping!" Actually I spoke halting Russian, but the children wanted to think I was completely fluent. We sat down to eat the meat and then went to play.

Should a writer recall such incidents in his autobiography? I think so. It is important to begin with a person's first memories, when and how the incident occurred. Some people can remember themselves from the age of three, and others can barely remember back to when they were ten. I am convinced that all this means a lot.

So that was a significant event in my childhood. My grandmother was so happy with me and for a long time afterwards would tell acquaintances the story that filled her heart with so much pride.

She enriched my childhood with fairy tales and songs, she took me everywhere she went—to hear traditional

Kirghiz storytellers and singing folk poets, to visit friends, to attend rituals held for newborns, funerals and weddings. She would often tell me her dreams. They were so interesting that when she dozed off I would sometimes wake her up to find out what she was dreaming. Short dreams, though, were not enough for me. Then she would go to the neighbors and "borrow" someone else's dreams. Later I realized that she simply made them up for me.

My grandmother died when I was still small. I lived in town all year round. Then I started school. Two years later I returned to my native village. But that time it was for a long stay and under hard circumstances.

In 1937 my father, a Party functionary and a student at the Institute of Red Professorship in Moscow, was unjustly arrested and perished.[1] Our family moved to the village and that was when the school of life began for me, with all its complexities.

In those hard times we lived with my father's sister, Karagyz-apa. I was fortunate to have her! She was a substitute for my grandmother. Like her mother, she was a good hand at everything, a storyteller and singer of ancient folk songs. The villagers respected her as much as they had my grandmother. My mother was seriously ill when we moved to the village and remained so for many years. There were four children in the family and I was the oldest.

It was a terribly difficult situation, but Karaguz-apa taught us that no matter what hardships a person endures, he will not perish among his people. Not only our relatives, the Shekers, but also our neighbors and complete strangers came to our aid. They shared everything they had with us—bread, fuel, potatoes and even warm clothing.

Once when my brother Ilgiz (he is now a scientist and director of the Institute of the Physics and Mechanics of Mining in the Kirghiz Academy of Sciences) and I were in a field gathering brushwood for fuel, a well-dressed man riding by on a fine horse approached us and asked who our father was.

Karagyz-apa always told us that in such cases we should hold our heads high, look people straight in the eye and tell them our father's name. My brother and I were very upset about what was being written about our father and Karagyz-apa was deeply embarrased by the situation. Somehow that illiterate woman understood that it was all a lie, that the charges against our

father could not be true. But she could not explain her convictions. I was reading books then about Cheka[2] intelligence officers and secretly dreamed of being sent to find some spy and, by catching him and dying, prove my father's innocence before the Soviet government.

So this man stopped and asked whose sons we were. Although it was tormenting, I did not hang my head and told him our surname.

"What are you reading?" he inquired.

It was a textbook as I recall, a book on geography that I was carrying under my belt. He looked at it and asked:

"Do you want to go to school?"

I sure did! Biting our lips to keep from crying, we nodded in assent.

"Okay, you'll go to school!" he said, and rode off.

A week later we started school. That man turned out to be one of the teachers, Usubaly Tynaliev. I was assigned to another teacher named Inkamal Joloeva, a very understanding woman. I went to work in the fields early in life: from the age of ten I knew what it was to be a farmer.

A year later we moved to the district center, the Russian village of Kirovskoye. My mother worked there as an accountant. Again I went to a Russian school.

Things were just beginning to settle down in our lives when the war against the Nazis began. In 1942 I had to drop out of school: my mother could not send all of us to school during the war.

Once again I returned to Sheker which was devastated by the hardships of war. As the most literate teenager, I was made secretary of the village Soviet. There was nobody else for the job, so I had to do it at the age of fourteen.

But, as they say, every cloud has a silver lining.

In my childhood I had experienced the poetic and happy side of life, whereas then I was seeing its most cruel, naked, bitter and heroic aspects. I saw my people in different conditions—at a time when our country was in the utmost danger and when the utmost spiritual and physical effort was required of us. It was my duty to see this—I knew every family under the village Soviet, knew every member of these families, and knew thoroughly every one of the simple homesteads. I learned all about the different sides of life.

Later during the war I worked as a tax collector for

the district finance office. If I had only known what a hard job that was, especially during the war when people were hungry! It was such a torturous job that a year later, in August 1944, I quit without permission and was nearly tried for that move. Then I got a job as an accounting clerk for a tractor team that was harvesting wheat.

The war continued and I learned more and more about life. All this was reflected much later, to the best of my abilities, in the novels *Face to Face, Mother Earth,* and to some extent in *Jamila* and *To Have and to Lose.*

In 1946, after I finished the eighth grade, I entered the Jambul vocational school for livestock experts. I completed all my practice work in 1947-1948 in my own village where I was able to see the postwar changes in the lives of the people I knew well.

After graduating as a straight A student, I was accepted in the Kirghiz Agricultural Institute. Incidentally, I also graduated from the institute with straight As.

I have loved literature since childhood. As a schoolboy I wrote compositions on topics of my own choosing, and at college I became increasingly interested in literature. I sought answers to questions that were on my mind in the best literature of those days. I thought that great works of literature should be written about the war and the heroism of the people. The subject of war had not yet been dealt with seriously in Kirghiz literature. I wanted Kirghiz readers to also be able to read the best books about the war. Motivated by this desire, I risked translating *The Regiment's Son*[3] and *The White Birch Tree*[4], although I did not have any notion of how to do a literary translation and how books are published. When I brought my work to the publishing house I was told that those books had already been translated long ago and would soon be released...

I was terribly disappointed, but it was these translations that started me on my literary career. As a college student, I wrote newspaper reports, articles and sketches.

After graduating from the institute I worked as a livestock expert. I was already writing stories by then. In 1956 I went to Moscow to attend Higher Literary Courses. Two years of such training gave me, a former livestock expert, a great deal. I not only gained knowledge in the humanities and in the theory of literature, but also developed my writing skills. Our seminars and discussions

were also a fine school of creativity. I tried to take in the best of what Moscow could offer on the cultural scene—in literature and the theater. After I finished those courses I became the editor of the monthly *Literaturny Kirgizstan*: afterwards I worked for five years as a *Pravda* correspondent in Kirghizia. That also helped me widen the scope of my observations and get a broader picture of life.

A writer, of course, should be capable of thinking artistically, but the development of his or her talent and individuality is connected with the social environment, intellectual experience and the cultural traditions of the environment, its world outlook and political system. The environment in our case is Soviet society, the socialist system and communist world outlook. Hence the creative orientation of Soviet writers.

It goes without saying that being awarded the Lenin Prize in 1963 for my *Tales of the Mountains and Steppes* was a happy and major event in my life. I am grateful to the people for this high honor.

No one becomes a writer on his own: the experience of predecessors fills the creative world of writers long before they are even aware of having literary abilities. True, far from all of us are capable of making discoveries on the difficult path of art. This depends on our talent and on how broad our vision of life is. Sometimes we make no progress, and even regress in terms of skill, profundity and character portrayals. That is apparently the way the literary process develops; it is complicated, uneven and sometimes difficult to explain.

I think about my own development often and for various reasons. Since I am talking about myself I would like to say something about *The White Ship* which has stirred controversy among readers. Disputes are only natural, they are necessary in literature. But what concerns me most in this case is the danger, as strange as it may seem, of very benevolent criticism, criticism that is very honest in its own way. Some readers who liked *Jamila*, *Duishen*, *Mother Earth*, etc., following their notions of art, want me to continue writing in that vein. I do not deny the significance of what I wrote before *Farewell, Gyulsary!* and *The White Ship*, but I do not want to stop there. Literature should selflessly carry its cross and penetrate life's complexities so that people will know, love and worry about all the best qualities in themselves, in others and in society. This is

the true purpose of art as I see it. I believe this will always be the case, because people seek in art the confirmation of their best aspirations and the renunciation of all that is evil, all that is unjust, whatever does not conform to their social and moral ideals. This does not happen without struggle, without doubts and hopes. It will probably be this way forever. That is why art will eternally have to tell people about the complexities and beauty of life.

I do not know how my career will develop and whether I can do something that is interesting. Time will tell.

1972

SNOW ON MANAS MOUNTAIN

I visit Sheker frequently, about two or three times a year. I go for various reasons—on business, to attend weddings and funerals... I want my sons, who are city boys through and through, to feel close to my village compatriots and our relatives. I do not know if I am succeeding. The times seem to be changing.

Our Sheker is a large and traditionally Kirghiz village. It has over 300 homesteads. Every time I go there I see new houses. The number of homesteads is growing and so is the village. It is in a prominent location, "by the head of the water," as the Kirghiz say—in the foothills of the Talass Mountains, across from Manas Mountain, the great twin peaks. The epic hero Manas used to race up on his horse to the top of that tall mountain to get a view of the surrounding area and see whether any enemies were coming. (It is not hard to imagine what an enormous territory Manas could see from that height. The scale was truly epic. That was how the people in ancient times wanted to regard their son and hero Manas.) Be that as it may, the impetuous and freezing cold Kurkureu River rushes into the valley from the permanently snow-capped Manas Mountain, bringing water and life to those who live on this land...

I always feel excited as I approach Sheker and can see in the distance the bluish-white snow on Manas, glistening on the inaccessible divine summit. If you look long at the mountain and the sky, time has a way of losing its qualities. The past seems to vanish. No, you think, nothing has happened, nothing has changed. Everything is like it was ten, twenty and maybe a hundred or a thousand years ago. Manas is standing on the earth as it always has. And the clouds hover over it as they always did, the very same clouds. And you are the same boy who, running out of the house in the morning, takes pleasure in seeing the mountain above the village. Unfortunately, it is only possible to daydream a minute or two...

The last time I went to Sheker I was more nervous than usual. I had my reasons. The monthly *Ogonyok* asked me to write about my fellow-villagers during the war. I hesitated at first, not being sure I had enough to write about, since there is only so much that can be said about the home front. War is primarily battlefields; everything else is secondary. I still had my doubts while I was on my way to Sheker. But as I approached the village, looking at the eternal snow of Manas Mountain, a lot came back to me.

There was something to write about. I had spent my childhood, the war years and postwar years there in the area that in those days was called the Sheker village Soviet. I began recalling all that and the people I knew in those days.

They were ordinary people, the same kind of workers, peasants and activists you would see in any collective or state farm. Now when I am remembering the war, I can see each one of them close up in the clear and intense light of the developments of the war years. I remember the rallies held in the first days of the war. The common responsibility for our country's future became the personal responsibility of each of us. Columns of volunteers departed for the front straight from the rallies in the district center. That was the essence of it. As I now realize, each person, child and adult, on the battle front and on the home front had a historic place in this grand struggle of the whole nation... Yes, historic. There is no other way it can be described.

Therefore, the phrases "before the war," or "after the war," "during the war," are meaningful. For me they signify more than simple chronology. For me these words represent a time of learning the hard way, a time when our society was gaining experience that was of world-wide significance. After all, the war was more than a global historic milestone dividing the 20th century into two parts of humankind's development—the prewar and postwar periods. It was also the lot of each person who lived in those days, a gauge of one's conduct and values. Literally every individual was affected by the war. I do not know anyone who was spared by it somehow; whoever was, inevitably came into conflict with the people, because it was the common fate of the people and no one could be an exception. (This was my message in my first story *Face to Face.*) The war demanded the utmost from each of our lives...

In this respect my personal experience is pertinent. I was thirteen years old when the war began. This was when my generation entered the adult world. I have a hard time now believing it myself: at the age of fourteen I was already working as secretary of the village Soviet. I was responsible for solving rather complicated social and administrative problems related to tne various aspects of life in a large village, in wartime at that. But then it did not seem as anything so unusual. Youths who had finished the seventh grade in 1941—Paizbek Mombekov (an educator his whole life, for thirty-three years), and Seitaly Bekmambetov (the current principal of Sheker's secondary school)—were already teaching in the primary grades. After the war they completed higher education. My brother Ilgiz, now Director of the Institute of the Physics and Mechanics of Mining of the Kirghiz Academy of Sciences, is three years my junior. During the entire war he went to school and delivered the mail. I am proud of him; he did his work conscientiously those bitter years. The barefoot and skinny boy of eleven (no one would let a boy like that go alone to another street today) carried the letters from the soldiers and the newspapers which he read out loud to the people in the fields; he had to walk many kilometers and cross the river to reach the nearest village where the post office was located. At the age of fifteen he was awarded a Medal "For Valiant Labor During the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945" by decision of a general meeting of the collective farm. He really deserved it. I can say that for sure.

But that is not the point. He and I, like many other teenagers during the war, owe our good qualities to our elders who were a fine example to follow in word and in deed.

I remember one day in the winter of 1942, Kenesh, a messenger for the village Soviet came for me to my house.

"Get in the saddle with me, Son. They want you at the village Soviet; apparently something important has come up." He slipped his foot out of the stirrup, helped me mount and we rode off. He sat in front and I sat behind him.

He was certainly an interesting person in our village. His real name was Ibraim. But everyone in the area called him Kenesh, which means Soviet. People called him that as an allusion to Soviet government. Being the poorest

of the poor, he was the first one in our village to call for power to the poor, for Soviet government. That illiterate farm worker was notable for promoting Soviet government his whole life, at every meeting, large or small. He would always emphasize that he did not want anything for himself: "All I need is a peice of bread for myself and some hay for my horse, nothing else. But I'll work for Soviet government day and night until I fall off my saddle." That is how he worked until the end of his days, as a messenger and volunteer political speaker. He died, as it were, in his saddle. To this day the people on the slopes of Manas Mountain remember him kindly and with a sense of admiration. During the war Kenesh was already an old man, but he was still vigorous and excitable. Several times I saw him make improvised speeches at meetings and rallies. He spoke from the heart and stirred people with his words...

So he brought me to the village Soviet. Three men were sitting in the cold room with a dirt floor and windows that were essentially fragments of glass. Kabylbek Turdubaev was a tall man with a gray beard, an elderly shepherd from Archagul, the nearest village across the river, and had become the new chairman of the village Soviet when the previous official left for the front. The two others were disabled soldiers wearing army coats: the chairman of the collective farm, Alisher Aidarov, who had only recently returned from the front, and the secretary of the village Soviet, Kaly Nukeev, his crutches leaning against the wall.

"You'll have to quit school for a while," said Turdubaev. "You'll finish up later, after the war. Kaly is going to be a team leader," he said, nodding to Nukeev. "He couldn't have a better job than this, being on crutches, but the farm can't get along without a team leader. You understand. There's no one else but you. I hardly know how to read and write. I've been herding sheep all my life. I need a smart assistant. So we decided on you."

That is how I became secretary of the village Soviet. Archagul, the village across the river, was also under our jurisdiction. Two big villages in the disturbing war time chaired by a shepherd and managed by a schoolboy. That was the situation. But life went on, posing problems that needed immediate solutions. We had much to do. And I was not all that literate. One of the documents from the district executive committee instructed us to conduct a *malleinization* (I later learned that this was a

veterinarian term for rubbing horses with a certain kind of medicine). I told Turdubaev that a *mobilizatsia* (mobilization) of all the horses was about to begin. He even turned pale: "But how can we get along on the farms without draught animals?" So he and I hurried to the district center, the Kirovskoe village, forty kilometers away. We set off at midnight. We were very excited when we arrived there, but we got an explanation for the misunderstanding. It was really very awkward. Moreover, when we left the district executive committee and started to mount our horses, I had a hard time getting on mine because it was big and I was small. To make things worse it was winter and I was wearing a fur coat with a belt around it and a hat. My clothing got in the way so I could not reach the stirrup. And we had to rush to reach the bank before it closed. While I was struggling to get on the horse myself, Turdubaev, a strong man, lifted me up and put me in the saddle. It was humiliating. What kind of village Soviet secretary was I if I had to be helped into a saddle like a child!

"I don't want this job anymore!" I said rather sharply.

"No one saw you," said Turdubaev to reassure me. "And you're going to have to stay on the job. Only you should finish school. As soon as the war is over go back to school. Here we go."

Now, after so many years have passed, I am grateful for having known from such a tender age, as it were, interesting and fine people. One such person was chairman of the village Soviet, the wise elder, Turdubaev, a former shepherd. A year and a half later, when literate people began returning from the front lines—wounded officers—he went back to his old job. Much later I met him once at a repast for a good friend of ours. We got to talking and naturally reminisced about working together in the village Soviet. I thought the old man would kid me about those times, about how a sniper had to substitute for a duck, as the saying goes. But he actually led a serious conversation. He said he often thought about whether we had done everything the way we were supposed to.

We certainly had to do a lot in those hard times. People were being drafted into the army and mobilized for work in the mines, lumber camps and even on the Chuisky Canal where construction work continued during the war. We did not simply hand people their draft notices and fill out the appropriate registration papers.

Turdubaev felt it was our duty to talk to every person and his family, to persuade and help them in word and in deed. He always sent them off with kind words of farewell and often went with them to the district center and the military registration and enlistment office, staying with them right up to their departure. Sometimes he asked me to go for him, although I could hardly do the job as well as he did. I tried hard to be serious, but I was just a teenager.

Once a shepherd who had been assigned to a work project did not show up at the village Soviet to go to the district center. The man told the messenger that he would not go. I was sent after him. He came to the door angry and irritated. Frankly, he was right. He herded the sheep all year round with his family and children. He and his wife did the work of four shepherds, but did not get paid accordingly. When he received his draft notice he came down from the mountains to his neglected village home that lacked all supplies—no fuel, no clothing and no feed for the livestock.

"How can I leave them here like this?" he exclaimed as he pointed to his small children and ailing wife who was lying in a corner covered with a fur coat.

I had no idea what to do. But I knew that the law has to be obeyed.

"You go on and we'll take care of your family," I assured him sincerely, although I had no idea at all how I could help his family. The shepherd smiled sadly:

"You're going to take care of them?"

"Yes, our village Soviet will."

"Okay, Son," he said as he sighed. "I'll take care of them myself somehow. Go on. I'll get things fixed up around here a bit and then I'll go anywhere you say."

I went back to the village Soviet upset by the whole affair. I told Turdubaev what had happened. He frowned and squeezed his beard in his fist from time to time, as was his habit.

"What do you suggest we do?" he asked in a deep voice.

"Help them," I said. "They need fuel, hay and flour. The children are cold and they look hungry."

"I know that myself. You promised on behalf of the village Soviet, so you'll have to keep your promise or people won't trust us. Go to the farm's chairman and ask him for a cart to bring some hay and straw for fuel. Also get him to issue them flour and potatoes. Tomorrow

the man will go off to a work project and should feel secure that we have Soviet government here. I may be an old man and you may be a kid, but we're the government just the same."

It was no simple matter getting what we needed from the chairman. It was a bad time to be asking for such things. He had plenty of his own troubles. Demands were made on him from all sides. No one was saying to him, "Here take this!" Everyone was saying, "Give this, give that!" To be able to give something work had to be done. But who would do the work? There was no time and no one to deliver hay and straw to people. So what if the man has been called to a work project! He's not the only one. The whole country is fighting. Every family is poor and in need....

It just so happened that my timing was bad in coming to the chairman. The man was in such a state! But I kept insisting that help was really necessary. I was desperate enough to grab a pitchfork. We were in the horse stable. When the chairman finally gave in, saying, "There's the horses and there's the harness, the straw's in the field threshing-floor; the hay's in stacks; there's no one to haul it; do what you want," I quickly harnessed the horses, threw a couple of pitchforks into the cart and drove it outside. I was in a hurry because it gets dark early in the winter. I stopped outside Paizbek Mombekov's house. He was my cousin and lived with relatives because his father was in the army and his mother had died. As I already said, Paizbek was teaching school then already at the age of fifteen. I was lucky he was at home. Together we went after the straw in the field. We got a big load of straw but our cart turned over on the way. We harnessed the horses again. Only we had a hard time putting the wheel back on the cart. At last we loaded the straw again. By evening, when it was still light outside, we arrived at the shepherd's house. I could see he had chopped down many trees in his yard. We unloaded the straw while he kept cutting with his ax. Hot and sweaty, he came up to us. We were silent; finally he said:

"Thanks, boys. I've cut down some poplars for firewood. They'll dry up a bit after I leave and will be good for fuel. It's a shame the trees were still young. Oh well, after the war, if God's willing, we'll plant some more."

I gave him the chairman's orders to issue his family flour and potatoes. I can still remember—eight kilograms

of flour and twenty kilograms of potatoes. I told him we'd bring him hay in the morning.

"I apologize for getting angry," muttered the shepherd, looking embarrassed. "I was really scared: the children are so small and lately my wife has been sick often. She caught a cold in the mountains. Otherwise I wouldn't have said a word."

Paizbek and I got a saw and the same evening spent a long time sawing the logs and chopping them into firewood.

I returned home late, the dogs barking at my feet. I did not sleep well that night because I was afraid I would not wake up in time to make sure all the mobilized men showed up who were supposed to go to the district center. But that was not the only reason. I was thinking about other things as well. I thought about the war. Before I had thought of war only as machine-gun fire and heroic deeds—enemy forces dying like flies whereas nothing could touch ours. It was a naive, childish illusion that was crushed. Every day the village Soviet received notifications about soldiers who had died in action. This one died a hero's death; this one, that one and the other one died in battle. The most terrible thing was informing the family of the deceased. Although the elders broke the bitter news as gently as possible and the whole village mourned the soldier's death, it was my job to deliver the actual "black letter," not right away, but after the explosion of suffering. Nevertheless I hated taking out of the field bag left to me by the former secretary the small piece of paper with a military stamp on it and the signatures of majors, captains or other commanders. The text was just a few lines long. I would quietly read it out, translating into Kirghiz, then fall silent. I would hear the deep and empty sigh that sounded like rocks rolling down a mountain. I had a hard time looking up at the family, although I was guilty of nothing. I would give them the piece of paper and tell them to keep it in a safe place. At that point the mother who had been containing her tears, would suddenly begin crying convulsively, then continue weeping bitterly. Surely the piece of paper was not supposed to be a substitute for her son?!

I was incapable of getting up, of leaving, of consoling them. No words of condolence can alleviate such grief! At those times I wanted to dash out the door, grab a machine-gun, yes, a machine-gun, and run with it non-

stop, all the way to the front, from where death notifications had come. Enraged, I imagined myself yelling and screaming as I shot the Nazis with infinite rounds of ammunition. I played all that out in my mind. Who would give me, a mere boy, a machine-gun! If I had only been taller...

Finally I would leave the family, depressed by the sorrow of people I felt close to. With my field bag slung over my shoulder I would be on my way. There were still more notifications to deliver.

Once I talked about those government-issued prewar bags ordinarily used by travelling officials to one of my village compatriots, Ashim Jakypbekov, a well-know Kirghiz writer and Director of the Kirghiz Film Studios. My bag had belonged to his older brother Aitaaly (at that time Ashim was in the first grade). Aitaaly was an outgoing fellow; he organized war games and took us on camping trips. Suddenly he grew up and not long before the war was the village Soviet's secretary. When I took over, Nukeev asked me if I had a bag and what I would use to carry papers. Naturally I had no bag; we carried our books to school tucked under our belts. When he found this out he took the bag from the bottom of a cabinet amidst some old papers. "Here, take this. It was Aitaaly's. It's been here ever since he left for the army. You can use it; you can't carry papers around in your hands."

That is how I came to have the bag. In it I found some notes, old receipts, undelivered notices of property taxes, and a love letter written in verse. It was titled *Ashyktyk kat.* Apparently Aitaaly had not got around to giving it to the girl it was for. I did not know what to do. The girl's name was not on the letter, only her initials. I did not feel I could show the letter to anyone, so I tore it up, because I was so young and underestimated its importance. I regretted it later. When the notice that Aitaaly had died in action ended up in that same bag I realized my mistake.

One of my duties was to hand out small bunches of locally produced matches, pieces of crude soap, thread and a quarter of a liter of kerosene issued per family—according to my list of families that had someone at the front.

Poverty, deprivation and suffering. I wondered if there would ever be an end to it all? It was quite a trial, but not the supreme test—the people were more courageous than

words can express as they held up staunchly in the menacing face of war. No matter how hard things got, when it seemed that it was impossible to withstand more and more hardships and the terrible burden, when it seemed that human patience had reached its limit, people kept struggling, continued doing everything they could.

Much has been said about the women during the war. They certainly deserve their praise as workers and mothers. If I were a sculptor or an artist I would create a portrait of a woman during the war which would express all at once my feelings of gratitude, admiration, pride and sympathy for her, for this great figure of the 20th century.

I remember a travelling artist once came to our village Soviet. In exchange for flour, the elderly man painted portraits of the foremost workers. Our beautiful Asiya Dubanaeva, the best team leader who was also jolly and outgoing, came out altogether different than she was in real life. It was her, but not really her. I do not know if that portrait still exists—a young and beautiful face with eyes full of anxiety and sorrow. We stood by the artist, watching him work. Someone told him that it did not resemble Asiya.

"She looks like everyone who is waiting for her husband," replied the artist.

Unfortunately, our Asiya never saw her husband again. The years passed by as she waited and worked, worked and waited.

Teenagers are simply overgrown children. But they worked along with the women, their still immature shoulders carrying the traditionally adult male burden of feeding their families. Boys of twelve and thirteen became hard-working farmers. In 1942 our collective farm in Sheker decided to plough an extra 500 acres of new land for spring crops. "Bread for the army!" That said everything. By today's standards it is no problem to plough up a couple of hundred hectares. Just get a tractor out in the field and the job is as good as done. In those days, using horses as draught animals with the farm's few ploughs, it was a tremendous feat to plough so much more land than planned. That's the way it was! In one day four horses with a two-share plough could dig up, at best, a little more than an acre of long-fallow or virgin land. You can imagine what monumental effort it took to plough 500 acres.

The teenage ploughmen had to drop out of school to do this extraordinary job, because the horses had to be prepared, starting in the winter. Draught horses require constant daily care, otherwise at the beginning of the sowing season they would not last more than a few days. Ploughing used to be the hardest job in agriculture. Every villager knows that.

To do the ploughing and sowing in time it was necessary that year to begin work very early in the spring. The soil was barely beginning to breathe. Winter was not really over. I remember it as if it were today; it was late February.

The very first days I went to visit my friends in the field in the Kok-Sai Steppe. When I was on the way a snow-storm started and everything around turned white. I'll never forget seeing those small ploughmen amidst the snowflakes floating in the air. The snowflakes were big, thick and melted quickly. It was snowing over a huge territory, dimming the view of the whole world. It was silent and lonely, only snow was falling, making not a sound. Only there was no stopping the ploughmen who kept the horses moving. Along the black furrows stretching over the knoll, ploughs were drawn one after another like ships in the mist on the high seas. They vanished behind the knoll as if diving with the waves. Then only the voices of the boys could be heard. I rode alongside the edge of the field.

The ploughs emerged from the whirlwind of snow. Teams of four horses each, breathing heavily and tensed up as they ploughed new furrows. The snow melted instantly on their hot backs, letting off white steam. It was hard-going for the horses; the ground was damp and slushy, their harnesses heavy with water. It was not any easier for the boys who were driving the horses. On their heads they wore hoods made of empty sacks that were also damp. They were mere boys. In that kind of weather under ordinary circumstances they should have been sitting at home in a warm room. But they were wartime children and they knew their lot and their responsibilities.

The snow kept falling. The black plough teams crawled through the white veil of snow. Ploughs continued moving forward without stopping. I could distinguish the boys' voices—Baitik, Tairybek, Satar, Anatai, Sultanmurat. They were all my own age. I did not want to come up to them for a long time so they would not see me crying...

A terrible thing had happened in the winter. One night I heard loud knocks on my window. Someone was bending over in his saddle, shouting:

"Get up! Hurry up to the stable! The horses have been stolen!"

I dressed in a flash and ran outside. People were dashing out of their houses, still pulling on their clothes. When I approached the stable I heard loud, excited voices. It turned out that at midnight, when the watchman fell asleep, some strangers had taken two of our best horses out of their stalls next to the gate. At first the watchman thought the horses accidentally got loose, and only realized what had happened when he saw that the saddles were also missing. He rushed out looking for them, but by then it was too late...

We had to catch up with the horse thieves. Without any saddles, we each jumped on the nearest horse and rode off in different directions after the culprits. I do not know what we would have done if we had caught up with them. What horse thieves would have been afraid of us boys? We continued the search until dawn, looking for the thieves in ravines, gullies, and abandoned winter sheds, but they were nowhere to be found and had not left a trace behind. They were experienced, all right. We were extremely upset. Here we had prepared the horses for ploughing, quit school especially for that, but the thieves could not have cared less.

I am deliberately trying to write about all this in the most restrained and laconic way.[1] If I go into more detail about life in our Sheker during that period, my story will not fit into the necessary framework of the genre. I will try to somehow classify people and events. I could tell many more interesting facts about my village school mates; we were the generation of teenagers that the day after the war started stepped right out of the world of childhood and into the thick of wartime life, into the terrible reality of the home front which demanded of us maturity and courage far beyond that of youngsters growing up under normal circumstance.

When I think about those young people in my village I realize that my generation became so viable and purposeful perhaps due to the hard conditions it endured. This does not at all mean that contemporary prosperity does little to develop viability in the youth. On the contrary, only through stupidity can a person use good to one's detriment. Every period makes its own demands on

people and presents its own problems. Therefore life is never simple if a person takes it seriously, is daring and does not seek an easy-going life. The beginning of a carefree life means the end of a purposeful personality. We could have never even dreamed of having such possibilities for personal development as young people have today. But that is not my point. I simply want to say that I am not ashamed of any of the young people my age during the war. Not one of them. They all married a long time ago and nearly all of their children are adults. They all have careers, and I am pleased to say that they have accomplished a great deal. I can vouch for any one of them. The Taisariev brothers—the "ploughmen" Baitik and Tairybek—still work on the farm; they are Communists and are well respected in the community. Baitik is a team leader of tobacco growers who is well known in the republic. Tairybek is both a good farmer and livestock breeder. I already mentioned Paizbek Mombekov who was a teacher for thirty-three years; he died two years ago. Toktogul Usubaliev started out as an assistant accountant and became the farm's chairman. Now he is the head of the nearby Bakair farm. Abdaly Nuraliev is a former Young Communist League organizer and an active member of the collective farm. Toktogul Mambetkulov and Batima Orozmatova have been schoolteachers in Sheker for years. Nuria Joloeva, Orozgul Usubalieva are also teachers in remote districts. Alymseit Doolbekov is a veterinarian with many years of practice behind him. Zhaparbek Dosaliev is a forestry worker. Turgunbai Kazakbaev is the chairman of *Rossia*, one of the largest collective farms in Kirghizia, which has 60,000 head of sheep. Mirzabai Joldosheva is the head accountant of another large collective farm in our Kirov district. Gapar Medetbekov has become a leading actor at the Naryn Drama Theater.

So that is what we have accomplished. Life was very hard, but it was not aimless.

The great Kazakh poet, Abai once said that life is like the sea in which one wave is followed by another, the wave of the "previous generation" is succeeded by another, and it is followed by yet another, and so on infinitely. And the sea is ever alive.

When I think about the war years I see that in our ethical development a major role was undoubtedly played by the "previous wave"—the older generation, the generation of war veterans. I could say a lot about that. Of

course, all generations are always interlinked. In peacetime there is a natural continuity of experience and traditions. In wartime it is much different. Our peaceful Sheker at the foot of the eternal Manas Mountain, a village surrounded by mountains, suddenly found itself in the mainstream of events shaking the world. The people from our area who were called up to defend the homeland rushed off to the battlefields while waves of evacuees reached our region. In the meantime, behind the mountains, trains headed west and east round the clock through the Maimak Railway Station which linked us to the outside world, through Jambul, the city closest to Sheker.

One of the first people who experienced this himself, who told us about the war, about the front, about tank battles, about exploding bombs, about forest fires, about soldiers in action, about hospitals, about surgeons, about death and courage was our famous singer and poet, Myrzabai Ukuev. He died long ago, but his songs are remembered and sung to this day in the Manas district.

Myrzabai Ukuev was the first wounded soldier that the whole village welcomed home with joy and confusion, because when he was helped out of the cart he was handed crutches: he had lost a leg. We had never seen such a sight before. We had seen crippled and crooked legs. But we boys had never seen someone with only one leg. It was terrible.

He had at one time been a young and handsome teacher. He rode on a gray pacer that we called Myrzabai's Ambler. Myrzabai liked to sing and make up his own songs while he strummed the komuz. But there he was with only one leg, unnaturally pale after being in hospitals and troop trains, standing on crutches and surrounded by his fellow villagers, smiling and crying with everyone else.

That evening a huge crowd gathered to hear Myrzabai sing the war songs he had composed in the hospital. It was a major event; I'll never forget it. All of us were entranced by Myrzabai's songs and his tales in verse about the war. People listened, holding their breaths as they thought of loved ones who were at the front. They listened and wiped away the tears. He sang about himself, about his fellow soldiers, but he was singing about each of us and about our people.

It is hard to translate or retell improvised oral poetry,

because the essence of the tales of folk poets and singers is in the telling, in the synchronization of performing and composing. Nevertheless, I will try. (We are the sons of various peoples—Russian, Kazakh, Uzbek and Kirghiz; in the army we became closer than relatives. We have one mother, our country, who nursed us all with her white milk. How can we strong men stand seeing our mother in trouble? Isn't she our support when we come down from the steep mountain? Let us swear, as the great warriors of the past did, that if we die we will lie buried in one field; if we are victorious we will stand tall on one mountain. That is what we told each other in the woods as we approached the places where we would do battle with the Nazis. The earth rumbled under our feet like in a big earthquake. Bombs were already falling, driving our souls out of our bodies with their terrible howls and throwing black dust into the sky. And we entered into battle near Leningrad.)

That was what he sang to our villagers. We were especially touched by the part of Myrzabai's story when the troop train heading from Novosibirsk to the front, having apparently changed its route, suddenly was on the line going through our Maimak Railway Station. At dawn, without slowing down at the station, the train went through Maimak Canyon, through a tunnel, along the Talass Range past the Manas Mountain. That was apparently when he made up the words that went straight to our hearts and that are still sung in our village. They were a son's words of farewell to the Ala-Too Mountains:

Out of sight is the Ala-Too,
Its snow-capped peaks and pure water streams.
Out of sight is our Manas,
Our white-topped native Manas.
Fare-thee-well, blue snows of the Ala-Too.
Fare-thee-well, our native Manas,
Wish your sons victory over the enemy.
I will take you with me in my vision—
My Ala-Too's snow-capped peaks and pure water
Streams,
My white-topped native Manas...

We always sang that song at homecomings and farewell gatherings. And, oh, they were so many!

That same winter we sent off the eighteen-year-olds.

It seemed like we had hung out with them not so long ago. They were older than us, but they were our friends. Now they were young men going off to war. Among them was Jumabai Orunbekov, a relative and friend of mine. He was so young. He had gone to school, then worked on the farm. That was the extent of his life, which he lost on the battlefield. I remember how he was the first to sing this song when the recruits got in the cart:

I will take you with me in my vision—
My Ala-Too's snow-capped peaks and pure water
Streams,
My white-topped native Manas...

They rode away through the village streets. Those seeing them off ran alongside their cart. Only Myrzabai stayed where he was on his crutches, listening for a long time to their song of farewell.

Myrzabai Ukuev was indeed well respected in our village: in times of sorrow and in times of joy Ukuev was a person who was always wanted and needed. His wisdom and songs instilled hope and convinced people to believe in and fight for victory.

Everyone in the village, children and adults, were proud of him and knew about his war exploits. They knew the names of the people he served with, who they were, where they were from, and who their commanders were, because he told us all about them in his poems sung about the war. We knew how and under what circumstances he was wounded and by whom he was saved.

It happened in the woods outside Leningrad in either the summer or fall of 1941. A shell exploded nearby in one of the battles. He remembered feeling something hit his knee. When he came to, the battle was still raging; he heard shooting and explosions all around him. Bleeding hard, he lay still because he did not have the strength to move. He was already resigned to die when a field nurse crawled over to him. She was a Russian girl named Tanya. We pronounced it Taniya. If only our Taniya knew how Myrzabai Ukuev's fellow villagers adored and loved her. It is a pity we will never know who Taniya was, since Myrzabai Ukuev is no longer alive. She managed to bandage his leg and get him off the battlefield. Here is what Myrzabai told us about her in song:

What a mother who gave birth to such a girl,
Who could not be kinder...
That woman is closer to me than my own mother.
What a father who raised such a girl,
Who could not be braver.
That man is closer to me than my own father...

Naturally, this is only a very approximate translation. Probably one should not even try to put on paper narrative poetry that is made up by the storyteller in front of his audience. Such poetry withers on paper like a flower that is dried between the pages of a book.

The postwar youth of Sheker owe much to war veterans such as Myrzabai Ukuev. He was extremely upset that we had to quit school. In 1944 when the war moved westward, when members of work projects and many wounded war veterans returned home, Myrzabai urged us back to school. Some of us had already returned to our studies by then. After the war I went to the Jambul vocational school for livestock experts. Those were real hard, hungry times. One day in between classes one of the students told me that a man on crutches was looking for me. I ran into the courtyard where I saw Myrzabai standing there, smiling and smoothing his mustache. I was so happy.

"I came to town on business and thought I'd stop by to see how you're mastering your science."

I told him all about our life there. He was satisfied.

"Let's go outside," he said. "I have something for you in the cart."

We went over to the gate.

"Here's what I want to say," he confided. "I know things are hard for you here, very hard. But don't you even think of dropping out. We have no right to do that now. The war is over. If things get too tough, let us know. We in the village will think of something. You just keep studying."

A combine operator in our village and a long-time Communist, Toilubai Usubaliev, was of Myrzabai Ukuev's generation, a friend of his who also set a good example for the youth. Now he is an elder with numerous grandchildren. His son, Saty Toilubaev, is the shepherd of an elite flock of sheep at the Kok-Sai collective farm. Saty's children are growing up one after another. Tolubai Usubaliev is highly respected by his descendants. In addition to that, on the eve of the 30th anniversary of

the victory over nazism I would like to also remind the younger generation of his family that Toilubai was one of those rare people during the war who, despite all his pleading, was not sent to the front. He was the only combine operator for several collective farms. His abilities as a mechanic are now legendary. No one would believe what he did was really possible. No one would even attempt to repair the machinery he managed to fix; it would be sent to the dump. But he breathed life back into dilapidated harvester combines. I wrote about his combine in *Jamila.* In the summer of 1944, during harvest time, I was his assistant. When the combine was operational we would work around the clock, not allowing ourselves any rest. The soldiers at the front could not wait, the crops could not wait. It was the most heroic summer of my life. I will never forget those days.

Now I hear another song. As I approached the village I saw the grass was already turning green alongside the road. Flocks of sheep with their young were grazing on the hillsides. The fields were divided into areas with row and winter crops, like checker boards. Up ahead were more fields, with either winter or cultivated crops. Behind me was Jambul, formerly Aulie-Ata, a caravan stopover, which has been growing by leaps and bounds, subject to the modern pace of urbanization. It was the departure point for my fellow villagers who were going off to the front and it was also where we brought our harvests to be sent to the front. Ahead of me I could see under the clouds the snow of Manas.

The first secretary of the Jambul Regional Party Committee, Khasan Bekturganov, formerly a political instructor of a ski company in the defense of Moscow, once told me that all soldiers swore to their fellow soldiers to live their lives so that they would have a clear conscience and be proud when remembering their comrades that fell in battle.

We could say the same thing about ourselves, about the host of people who worked on the home front.

This is what I thought about as I rode to the village and looked at the snows of my native Manas Mountain.

1975

LAUD FRIENDSHIP AND HUMANENESS

This spring marked a joyful event for me—my novel *Jamila* was published in France. I was asked by *Moscow News* to write a few lines about myself. But before I begin I would like to take this opportunity to express once again my heartfelt gratitude to our dear friend and one of the major writers of modern France, Louis Aragon, who translated my novel and wrote such a soulful foreword. I would also like to thank Elsa Triolet, Andre Burmser and other friends for their kind letters and comments and convey fraternal greetings to all French writers.

The publication of *Jamila* in France stirred a great deal of excitement in Kirghizia. This is evidenced in newspaper articles and letters from readers. It is now jokingly referred to as the "French Jamila". This would seem to be an insignificant fact, but it has made its own small contribution to friendship and trust. We feel somewhat closer to the French now and have a sort of a starting point for cooperation in literature.

In this context I would like to say a few words, although they are common knowledge, about the role that literature can play among peoples seeking ways to become closer, promote peace and progress. When *Jamila* was translated in France I simply regarded it as a stroke of luck, but the reviews in the media of other countries and of the Soviet Union and the fact that *Jamila* is being translated into other languages have convinced me that this was not merely good fortune. The world today, I mean the forces of good will, cannot be stopped in their desire for mutual understanding, for mutual cultural exchange. This urgent and vital need is growing daily and becoming a significant feature of our era.

To live in friendship and respect it is necessary to know more about how one's neighbor lives at home, know his intellectual desires, aesthetic views, morals, customs and share the best accomplishments and experi-

ence. In this respect books are a powerful medium.

Soviet literature from its very outset filled the hearts and minds of people with the light of humaneness, kindness and belief in human beings. It praised more ardently what is beautiful and noble in life and was the strongest supporter of social justice. This quality is the very foundation of its total service to the people. It is precisely because of this quality that Soviet literature represented by its best writers has earned the recognition of readers around the world.

The literature of our different ethnic groups is now entering the international scene. The literature of the Kirghiz people originated only after the 1917 Socialist Revolution. We can already proudly say that the best works of Aaaly Tokombaev, Tugelbai Sydykbekov and Kasymaly Bayalinov have been published in many countries and in many languages. Kirghiz literature is continuing to develop. We have something to say in our books, we have something to share with other peoples.

Biased journalists from other countries who visit the USSR often deliberately present a distorted picture of all the best aspects of life in the Central Asian republics. It would be much better if people abroad had more opportunity to read books by Central Asian writers. I think that readers in the West would undoubtedly be interested in the works of such Kirghiz writers as Umetaliev, Malikov, Abdumomunov, Eraliev, Raitemirov, Beishenaliev and others whose books enjoy great popularity in our country.

These books would give people insight into the soul of our people and the creative strength which has been bringing about enormous changes. People should hear the songs of our mountain regions and plains, songs of freedom, of love, of joy and of victories in building a new life.

Mutual interest in culture and the arts which fosters good feelings toward one another, promotes friendship and humaneness is undoubtedly beneficial.

I would be very happy if the readers of *Jamila* found in it an echo of these ideas, fell in love with Jamila and Daniyar whose happiness stemmed from living and working on the land and loving it as they loved each other.

People often ask me who were the prototypes of Jamila and Daniyar. It is hard to say exactly. They were real people with whom I worked and lived on the collective

farm, and they continue to exist in my life; I meet them every day. I see new Jamilas and Daniyars growing up before my very eyes. They are wonderful people about whom I want to write my very best and most optimistic prose.

1959

MUCH DEPENDS ON YOU

An Open Letter to Schoolchildren in the German Democratic Republic

After receiving twenty-two letters in one package from you, I was quite pleased. Although as you may imagine I was also somewhat disconcerted; answering all your letters is not such a simple matter. So I am writing one to all of you.

I am, of course, pleased to hear that the *Camel's Eye*[1] is in a textbook used in German schools, to know that it will help you learn to some extent about life in Kirghizia, and to hear your favorable comments. But most of all I appreciated your remarks about yourselves, about your lives, and about, as you put it in your letters, "...what we think and what we want in life."

Indeed, "...what do we think and what do we want in life?" Every generation enters the adult world with that eternal question.

As far as I can tell, each of you finds something especially interesting in your environment and is willing to devote your energy and abilities to your chosen vocation.

Twenty-two individuals, twenty-two personalities, twenty-two people who have their own ideas about how to be most useful to society, what happiness is, what it means to have a good life (wear nice clothes, grow flowers and have a garden, love nature, be athletic, maintain your figure) make it hard for me to support one and not agree with another. Most importantly, all these aspirations are natural. Obviously, each one of you is right. The sum of these differences will reflect the multifaceted needs of people today.

But there are some comments in your letters that stirred me deeply and with which I totally agree.

You write: "We are the same age you were when Nazi Germany attacked your Soviet homeland." Yes, that is right. I was attending school then. I think it must be hard for you to imagine what a death-dealing war that was, what great effort and sacrifice it took for the Soviet

people to defeat the Nazi system in Germany. Our hatred for the enemy was so great that, out of childish naiveness, my whole class refused to study German. How could I have known that many years later I would receive a letter from German youth saying: "We thank your country for freedom and peace."

For you and for us this is extremely important. This is the significance of the outcome of the greatest human struggle in history that brought the world peace, freedom and happiness. Our fathers and brothers, the victors, did everything they could to win. It has been twenty-five years since then; new generations have grown up. Your time has come when much will depend on your way of thinking, your way of acting, as well as the way of thinking and way of acting of your counterparts in other countries.

Reading your letters, I could visualize a new Germany, a socialist Germany. Reading your letters, I found myself thinking that there is no force that could break the bonds of our friendship, the bonds of our socialist alliance. I think about how hard it is for peoples to find the way to peace and accord, what sacrifices we made for this sake. (Edeltruad writes in his letter: "When my father fell off the roof I realized what it means to have a father and what it must feel like to lose your father..." In our country millions of people suffered the pain of such losses.) That is why it is the duty of every honest person to protect, as if it were our own life, the peace that has been attained, our friendship and loyalty to the ideas of socialism.

I can understand your concern about the many years of blood-letting events in Vietnam[2] caused by the American militarists. Your souls are pure and you are extremely sensitive to the criminal and brutal killing of civilians who are heroically defending the freedom of their country. You have written in red ink in Russian: "End the war in Vietnam!" That is our joint appeal to the conscience and reason of humankind; this is our demand to the American aggressors.

Manfred writes that in 1958 he and his father lived in Vietnam where his father worked on building ships. Everything there has been bombed and the wharf destroyed. "Will it take a long time to rebuild the wharf and repair the ships?" he asks.

If only a wharf and some ships were all that have been damaged! The crimes of the US troops in Vietnam have

no equal in recent history; they are like the eternally cursed Nazi crimes against humanity. Any evil in the world must come to an end sooner or later. An end to the US War in Vietnam will also come. The guarantee of that is the fearless will of the Vietnamese people, the unending solidarity and aid to Vietnam being given by all countries and people yearning for justice and peace on earth.

My dear friends, we live in complicated times of intense struggle between the forces of destruction and those wanting to build a new life. The victory of progressive forces is facilitated, for one, by those noble impulses of the soul that are clear from your letters. Nourish them!

Those were my thoughts after reading your letters. I felt the need to tell them to you in an open letter.

As for my visiting you, whenever I come to the German Democratic Republic the first chance I get I will try and visit your school. Best wishes to your literature teacher.

1968

A POINT OF CONTACT

A Dialogue with Critic Victor Levchenko

Levchenko: It has been over thirty years since World War II ended, but in the books of modern writers the battles are still raging and the canonade is still thundering. Your last novel *The Cranes Fly Early* is also devoted to the war. Why have you taken up this theme once again? Was your choice dictated by contemporary problems as well?

Aitmatov: The modern reader indeed is presented with an abundant choice of fiction and nonfiction about the war. In addition, this subject finds its way on television and the theater. The war theme is certainly prevalent in the arts today. Of course, people do not dwell only on war recollections. But since humankind has still not adopted a *global* way of thinking, since people still do not care about others as they care about themselves, not wanting to recognize that others also fear death, suffer and worry and also love life, since the contradictions and forces of confrontation in social development around the world still exist today, threatening to evolve into military confrontation, the war theme remains one of the most viable and compelling forces in terms of its frightening experience, one of the most, I'd say, "preventive" subjects (if, of course, the writing is from humanistic positions).

The threat of war still exists.

In light of what I have said, this small novel of mine can certainly be considered among those works that are on the subject of *man and war.* Naturally this theme can be analyzed in a variety of ways: people on the war front, home front, behind enemy lines and in partisan detachments. Especially popular lately are stories about intelligence officers on enemy territory.

In my novel I wanted to show people who were *indirectly* affected by the war, rather than directly—something that has been written about by many before me. One example is *Mother Earth*[1]. The war began somewhere far away, but in the story of Tolgonai it

makes itself felt on a wheat field.

Levchenko: Incidentally, the same is true of *Jamila*[2]. It is a love story, but in it we strongly feel the influence of war: "Wherever the people went off to war bitter paths were left behind."

Face to Face[3] is about war itself. We still do not know how the story will develop when we read in the beginning about how the poplars, as straight and thin as ramrods, are losing their leaves, but we are already apprehensive about the events to follow.

Aitmatov: It is simply a Kirghiz analogy to say that someone is as thin as a ramrod. I didn't make it up. Perhaps it ushers up a certain association of ideas, but it was really by accident, not at all deliberate. However, that s not what's important. The *impact* of war is certainly present in *Jamila* and in many other stories of mine. I believe that approach is the most beneficial and interesting in world literature; it enables us, so many years after the war, to examine the human experience in precisely this indirect way. The battles will always remain in the forefront. But, as I said before, there are numerous aspects.

I'll try to explain mine. Either consciously or unconsciously I wanted to talk about a person, about a teenager, and how his life is affected by war. He is part of society, which means that he shares some of the burden. This is the first thing. The second thing is that I had a broader goal—to show that no matter how destructive war is it cannot destroy a human being. War changes habits, lifestyle, relations between people and brings material deprivation. War can make people hard, can make them want to fight only for themselves. In this case the forces of cruelty take their worst form. But precisely then, despite the nature of war and as a challenge to war's destructive force, the human soul blossoms. It puts forth its best and protective forces to extinguish evil.

Now, incidentally, the problem of cruelty is in the focus of the arts in other countries, especially in movie-making and in the theater. It is one of the most exploited categories. Attempting to play on our instincts, "mass culture" often reproduces physical cruelty—violence, murder, torture and blood. This always has an emotional impact and evokes fear. It is a sure way to affect people's souls and is an attempt to make art hypnotic and blinding. Not only cheap literature tries to play on

these instincts. Major writers also depict cruelty. However, not in the physical sense, but the more complicated kind of cruelty that is based on a person's inner needs, the laws of one or another environment or a person's psychological state. There are even theories maintaining that evil is inherent in human nature.

But I believe that art should stem from normal human life. I am for normal art, not criminal or maniacal art. A person's finer qualities depend on the extent to which he is humane. This is what I try to show.

I could have portrayed Sultanmurat in a different way: vividly depict his fight for justice by violent means, how he punishes the horse thieves or, on the contrary, how he is the victim of violence. I had a different goal—to bring out those qualities which manifest the genuine and normal essence of man. This is more difficult. Showing how good combats evil is no easy task.

Levchenko: It is not absolutely necessary that when you come out against cruelty in your stories you have to avoid showing brutality.

Aitmatov: That's true if you exclude physical cruelty. In everyday life there are thousands of manifestations of cruelty. Courage and ability are needed to see these manifestations. For instance, a person may be quite normal, but deep down have a cruel streak. How will he behave in a crisis situation? What will win out in him—good or evil? What kind of person is he—evil or kind? Kind up to a point? To me that hidden potential for cruelty is more interesting than fighting or murder. Although I repeat that this is not what I am analyzing. I try to bring out the reserves of *human* forces in man that combat evil.

Now more about whether my choice is dictated by contemporary problems. Of course it is. In peacetime people also experience cruelty, although it is not in fierce battles but in common everyday affairs. The richer a society is the more people are tested by prosperity. Sometimes when people do not see any meaning in this abundance, it hardens them. This is especially apparent in Western society. In our country too, unfortunately, we see many instances of cruelty and the fetishization of material things.

I was walking in the outskirts of town today and saw the following scene: at the side of the road there were two brand new red Zhiguli cars surrounded by a few young men looking proud and even defiant as if they

were preparing to be photographed. They were wearing pretentious clothes, smoking, and looking at passersby almost contemptuously. Okay, I thought to myself, perhaps they are not so entranced by their cars: "I drove so many miles... I installed such and such gadget in my car..."

Perhaps they really are not intoxicated by the idea of being car owners and do not think that this makes them different from others. But if they have no other, more important interests, if they are just accessories for their Zhigulis, they are in trouble. I feel sorry for such people. There they stand looking so self-satisfied: "We are really something." But if they have other interests, if they enrich each other intellectually and spiritually, if their mouths and eyes, as a Kirghiz saying goes, are not filled with fat, of course, there would have been nothing wrong with the scene I witnessed this morning by the cars.

Levchenko: Undoubtedly the connection is not a simple one between puritanism and spirituality. In that case it is all the more important for people to be tested by prosperity. Although what counts is not a car itself, but one's attitude toward it.

Aitmatov: A car should be regarded in the same way as a coat button. One should understand that cars are not the purpose of human existence.

Prosperity that helps develop people as individuals in a *socialist* society is our purpose in working. But if people regard material well-being as the goal of existence, if they have an uncontrollable weakness for things, degradation is inevitable. Such human beings lose their essence.

That is why in *The Cranes Fly Early* (of course, for readers who like the novel) I wanted to deal with those *spiritual* qualities that are always beautiful, especially in terrible times.

Levchenko: And that can even make a person truly happy in terrible times?

Aitmatov: This happiness has to be understood. I think there were fleeting moments of human happiness in the battlefields where people faced death. Soldiers seized nameless heights from the enemy, but also reached the summits of the human spirit.

Levchenko: To say that *The Cranes Fly Early* is about the war is not quite right: it would be more precise to maintain that it reflects your youthful impressions of the war years. Since the impressions of childhood and

youth are extremely important to creativity, I would like to ask you whether these memories are the reason why you, after having travelled nearly all over the world, remain in spirit in your native Sheker and write about what you once experienced there?

Aitmatov: The memories of childhood and youth are truly important to a writer. It is the sacred well from which writers draw their thoughts, pictures and faces. Childhood and youth are when a person is most impressionable and perceptive of the world's beauty.

Levchenko: The Turkish poet, Fazil Hüsnü Daglarca, has what I think is a marvelous poem about that; it is called *An Open House.*

> *Children are a house*
> *Whose doors are always open wide.*
> *This house is visited by*
> *Camels and cats,*
> *Clouds and birds.*
> *This house is visited by whole towns.*

Aitmatov: I know that poem and the poet. I'm very pleased that you mentioned him; I know him very well. Getting back to what we were talking about, I would like to say that childhood is visited by whole cities. Later on in life we have no time to admire nature and no time to spend in quiet contemplation. In childhood we are by ourselves more and are more sensitive.

Levchenko: When I read *The Cranes Fly Early*, *The White Ship*[4] and *Jamila* I kept thinking that many details in the stories, many touching aspects of everyday life and not only everyday life could not have been invented, that you most likely took them from your "sacred well."

Aitmatov: For instance, the rock we called the Saddle on which I imagined myself crossing the rushing Kurkureu River, is still there today. Of course, real life scenes were embellished on by my imagination in childhood, but I used them precisely in this altered form. Many other details as well apparently came from the world of childhood.

Incidentally, we're not the first ones to point out the importance of a writer's youth; many others have written about this. A child's impressions last a lifetime. I have visited exotic places that I dreamed of seeing when I was still a boy—Africa, India. And so I wanted to see and understand as much as I could. But now when I try to

tell others what I have seen I have to force my memory to recall those scenes. Of course, all those foreign things I have witnessed as an adult could have been part of me if they had surrounded me in childhood. If they had been my homeland.

Now when I hear the word "homeland" I can't help but conjure up a picture of my childhood homeland. It's automatic. Only after that do I think about my whole homeland—from the Baltic to Kamchatka—the entire territory of the Soviet Union. And I never tire of my childhood homeland; I always remember it effortlessly.

Levchenko: I suppose it is extremely important to you as a writer that the homeland of your childhood was Sheker, a village, not a city where a child's life is more regulated and more subject to the explicit instruction of adults.

Aitmatov: I wrote in *Literaturnaya gazeta* (Literary Gazette) that my son cannot tell a magpie's egg from a sparrow's. Although city life is better for *intellectual* development, people who grow up in such circumstances lack certain other qualities. They comprehend our complex world, but not all of it.

Nature, grass, woods, mountains, birds and animals are not part of that world at a time when a person is especially impressionable. Later people often grow indifferent to nature.

Levchenko: And we try to persuade such people to protect nature.

Aitmatov: That was not my point (although in my day protecting nature was not even an issue). I'm not talking about environmental protection but about how important it is to learn *to take to heart* and *understand* every phenomenon of nature, to appreciate it. Although in my day, too, when we killed birds, we were told it was a sin. These words became part of our consciousness not because it was a sin from the point of view of religious people, but because it was *immoral* to kill birds.

And so we all have our world of childhood. For me it is Sheker and its environs, the mountains, the Kurkureu River which unfortunately has disappeared, a fact that hurts me very much.

Once a friend of mine and I had an argument. I don't know who was right. I think that rivers should flow naturally, along their own course. But my friend believes that rivers, like people, can be commanded. Where do you draw the line?

There is such a term: a "regulated" river. That means it has no water (it has been channeled to other places for economic reasons). In my opinion people who make this possible are crossing the line set by nature. But my friend maintains that people have the right to do this to a river.

Levchenko: It's strange, but in our age we are for some reason shy about saying that people have always adapted themselves to the environment and should do so; it sounds much better, of course, to say that people conquer nature. But sometimes they are Phyrric victories.

Some friends of mine who are mountain climbers told me that in the Tien Shan Mountains they investigated glaciers to see if they could be melted. The ice can be covered with a layer of some dark substance that attracts the sun rays causing glaciers to melt into valleys and fill rivers with water. But who knows what such a process would trigger off. After all, this changes the climate, violates the balance of nature and introduces chaos.

Aitmatov: Yes, this is a complicated problem. Such utilitarianism frightens me. We need water for cotton, beets, potatoes, wheat and tobacco, but we risk losing rivers, grass and other natural resources, which is not the best thing that we can do on earth. We have to think of ways to conserve nature. A river is beautiful; it shouldn't be turned to manure. We have to find other alternatives. We have to use nature in different ways.

I am also concerned about other changes. For instance, Sheker has changed. More houses have been built and old ones have been renovated. Homes now have wooden floors and warm stoves. My village has electricity, televisions and automobiles. That's good in general, but we have also lost some things: people are less caring about each other, show less compassion and solidarity. Today we ordinarily understand solidarity in political terms, but I am talking about solidarity between relatives and compatriots.

I am, of course, pleased by what's new. But some things about it are disappointing. It is good that my fellow villagers are literate and know how to use machinery, but I am upset, above all, because they are forgetting good folk traditions, and second, because they do not always value their own distinctive culture.

In my lifetime I have met illiterate people who adhered completely to the loftiest humane principles. This is the main thing. Therefore I write about the people I have

known and remember who were special people who followed noble moral principles.

The big Kirghiz village serves as my artistic haven. The life of these people has inspired many of my ideas, characters and images. Thus, my former Sheker is included in the spiritual set of modern problems, and this cannot help but please me. Although I repeat that I am still somewhat sad about the things that no longer exist.

But I am also interested in what's happening today.

Levchenko: Do you visit Sheker often?

Aitmatov: Two or three times a year.

Levchenko: Do your impressions from these trips give you material for your work?

Aitmatov: I have never intended to write about Sheker directly, because art must always *transform* material. Only then is it art.

Levchenko: I am not just talking about material in the direct sense (for a story), but also in the figurative sense—for creating a context of history and time, as a starting point.

Aitmatov: I think every writer needs a starting point, *point of contact* with the land. Of course, the entire experience in this should be a synthesis, a totality— life in the city and travel and much more. In the vernacular of economists one could call Sheker my fixed capital, and "much more" is the capital I receive from other sources. Perhaps in time these will come to be dominant in my work.

Levchenko: Anything is possible, of course, but even now it is certain that in portraying your Sheker you manage to raise not only "local" problems but issues of universal interest. For instance, Louis Aragon took such great pleasure in translating your *Jamila* into French and called it the most beautiful love story in the world. And other works of yours have gained acclaim not only in this country, but also abroad. So the "bridge" adjoining Sheker with the whole world is quite strong. Did you realize this when you were writing *Jamila?*

Aitmatov: Did I realize this? I have always felt that "Sheker's problems" should pass through an artist's heart; only then can they be issues of universal interest. In each concrete case there *are* problems that can be examined in *universal* terms.

Here is a classical example. If Dostoyevsky had not been so brilliant and so capable of compassion and sym-

pathizing with the pain of others, *Crime and Punishment* would have been no more than an account of a criminal offense. Dostoyevsky lent enormous *philosophical* meaning to *criminal* actions. When Raskolnikov tried to justify his intentions, when he reasoned that he was young and would therefore do more for humankind than an old woman usurer nobody needed, the question of violence and egoism arose.

Levchenko: Specific problems become universal, poetic and philosophical, of course, owing to a writer's intelligence and talent. With the stroke of an eminent writer's pen, a village can become a place where the most complicated, globally significant and universal problems are dealt with.

Aitmatov: Even if a writer does not raise such global problems as Dostoyevsky, but puts his heart into his work, the problems he or she raises can also be of *universal interest.*

Levchenko: I imagine that another device of yours is what critics call myths. Don't you think they lend narrations even more universality?

Aitmatov: Why myths?

Levchenko: Because a universal model of the world is contained in their structure. Allegories and symbols can stem from myths.

Aitmatov: No, it's not myths that lend narrative universality but the knowledge of general laws. What is wrong with so-called local writers? They may know local life inside and out, but they cannot always rise above it. Life as they portray it is uninspired, is not imbibed with their passion. This is the root of provincialism in literature and the reason why many writers fail. They try to show how things were and how things are today. But their stories do not move, captivate or elevate the reader. They are ordinary documentary sketches, not works of art.

A writer must have a modern mentality, be erudite, know history and related sciences. The study of literature, for instance, is also a way to comprehend life. It helps the writer analyze and understand life, and learn the laws of beauty. I highly value the works of Mikhail Bakhtin and Pyotr Palievsky; they give the reader interesting food for thought.

There are people who know many fairy tales, folk legends and myths; they remember all of the smallest details. In addition to this an author needs *modern* preparation—modern knowledge and awareness of the entire

past experience of world culture. This is what a writer requires as a bearing. Without it a writer cannot deal with local problems at a high enough level. This also applies to young and beginning writers who may be similar to local writers in terms of accumulated knowledge. This knowledge and inner culture, of course, comes with experience. If I were writing *Jamila* or the *Camel's Eye* right now I would have made them much more complicated.

Levchenko: In the *Camel's Eye*, although you do not avoid conflicts and life's contradictions, the nature of their resolutions is different than in *The White Ship*. In *The White Ship* the conflict is more profound and tragic. Perhaps for this reason the novel is in the last analysis much more optimistic than the *Camel's Eye*. Why? Because the tragedy of it heals and purifies us, because, as Aristotle would say, it acts as an emotional catharsis.

The same thing could be said of *Jamila*. This is perhaps more important than the unrestrained and aimless "dissection" of daily life that some of our writers so often engage in and which harms them so much. When reading such a book you feel as though you are peeping through a keyhole. Some people say that such glimpses are instructive, but in my opinion they merely satisfy our curiosity.

Aitmatov: Perhaps... But since we have started talking about literature *in general*, I would like to say that I think literature suffers even more when writers go beyond its bounds. Literature loses its impact when writers obviously turn into common journalists, when they give direct answers to economic problems.

But let's get back to the question of myths. Myths are the raw material of folk consciousness that must be *drawn* into one's art.

Levchenko: There are different ways of drawing folklore into a literary work.

In *Farewell, Gyulsary!*[5], for instance, the similar fates of Tanabai and Gyulsary are more like a poetic device. And the moving fairy tale of the Mother Reindeer in *The White Ship* cannot help but be perceived as a moral imperative, as an appeal to honor the traditions and precepts of our ancestors, otherwise humankind will perish.

What does a folk epos mean to you most of all: the confirmation of eternal, stable and universal principles

that are still valuable to this day, or a poetic device that enables a transition from concrete narrative to symbolic images?

Aitmatov: I always have the epos in mind. It is a multilayered and multifaceted creation of folk wisdom. But I do not simply include an epos in my stories; I try to use it in an assimilated form.

My motives vary. In one case it is a device. In *Farewell, Gyulsary!* the hunter's song is a device that conveys the tragedy in the hero's life, a state of profound emotional turbulence. In *The White Ship* it is the main line of the novel.

The way in which an epos is used cannot be planned and there is no single way to do it; each concrete case requires a different approach which obviously depends on the outlooks of the heroes. Sometimes an epos is the hero's cultural foundation, sometimes the hero, the hero's grandfathers, grandmothers and parents know *Manas*[6], sometimes an epos is included in their spiritual orbit and harmonizes with their mood and upbringing. If I wrote a novel about Academician Kurchatov I would not even consider using a folk epos.

In some cases I include in my stories *impersonal* strata of folk consciousness which do not come from the author and especially not from the hero. This is when I want to say something *universal.*

Levchenko: Nevertheless, despite the fact that you change the epos substantially, in many cases your stories borrow from the epos directly. Therefore I would like to ask you what, in your opinion, is the most productive and promising way of using folklore in literature: stylization of the vernacular and the incorporation of folklore heroes and fairy tale elements in the fabric of the story, or the use of mythologems—mythological structures—which help reveal the fundamental principles of human existence in modern situations and conflicts?

Aitmatov: The latter is most productive. The stylization in imitation of a myth is apparently more exotic, a mythologem helps reexamine events, see the complex, invisible and sometimes even contradictory link between them that truly leads to the fundamental principles of human existence.

In connection with this conversation I would like to call attention to *Ballads of the Steppelands* by the talented Kazakh writer, Abish Kekilbaev. In this book the author uses mythological systems and structures to

deal with important problems of past and contemporary history.

This book—at a very high level of thought—is a combination of myths, legends and contemporary life, a combination of the experience of history and our times. In my opinion all these components (plus, of course, the writer's talent) have made the novel not only rich in content, but also *artistically* significant.

Levchenko: In *Jamila*, when Daniyar and Jamila leave their village, it is reminiscent of Adam and Eve being driven out of hateful paradise. Did you get the idea from some other work? Or am I just reading it into your story?

Aitmatov: That is really an interesting thought. Knowledge of Christian mythology probably does enrich the reading of *Jamila*, but when I was writing it I was not thinking about that. Have you read what Gachev had to say about *Jamila* in his *Love, Man and the Era?* I found it very interesting; I learned many things from it.

Levchenko: Do you mean that it is just a coincidence that the biblical legend and *Jamila* are similar?

Aitmatov: Yes, that often happens.

Levchenko: I think that we have come back to the "eternal" problems of the psychology of creativity and how art is perceived. In the beginning of our conversation when we talked about your novel *Face to Face* you said that in comparing a poplar with a ramrod you were not alluding to the theme of war, although that is what I had thought. It is hard to say in this case who is right and who is wrong. Although there are cases when a writer "knows not what he does," does not understand the full implications of what he is doing. At the same time readers often have false insights that come from allegorical literature. It is no wonder Humboldt once said that any understanding is the lack of understanding. Here I would also like to recall the classical case when critics found all sorts of allusions in the second part of *Faust* even though Goethe himself did not create any allegories.

Aitmatov: Anything is possible. Once someone asked me why my novel was titled *The White Ship (After the Fairy Tale)* when it was published in a magazine, but as *After the Fairy Tale (The White Ship)* when it was released in book form. The person wondered whether by switching the position of the title and subtitle I was covertly indicating a change of accent from the symbol to the result, from the dream to the reality, from the fairy tale to what happened to my heroes after the fairy tale.

The explanation is much more simple. When I brought my novel to *Novy mir* Alexander Tvardovsky said that *After the Fairy Tale* sounded too ordinary and traditional and suggested *The White Ship* instead. I preferred my title because I thought it was more to the point.

Levchenko: Well, I think that case should be instructive to the critics: there's no use trying to figure out why an author changed something in a story.

But let us get back to our conversation about epos. Although we have talked a lot about oral tradition in your writings, about what you have drawn from *Manas*, I would like to underline something else: folklore is so organically interwoven in your works with contemporary life that one does not even notice the line between reality and the symbolic mirror of myth that reflects this reality. To get back to the fairy tale of the Mother Reindeer, doesn't reality essentially repeat the fairy tale that Efficient Momun tells the Boy? But in life the symbolic fairy tale, in my opinion, does not become an instructive parable but a tragedy: the old man himself does just what his own fairy tale warned him against. The most terrible thing is that Momun offended the memory of his ancestors, went against his own conscience and behests—but for what? For the sake of his ill-fated daughter and for the sake of his grandson! Thus tragedy takes on not only universal meaning as, for example, in Sartre's philosophical plays, but also a humane nature as in the works of Pushkin and Shakespeare. It grips us, stirs our emotions and forces us into realm of its problems. Such a combination of philosophy and truly Shakespearean feelings characterize you as an innovator as well as a continuator of the traditions of the great realists...

Which of the classics is closest to you in terms of style, mood and portrayal of the hero? Who could you call your mentor?

Aitmatov: You have talked a lot about Shakespearean traditions and about innovation. But I would first like to say something about Momun. I do not agree with you. Momun offended the memory of his ancestors and went against his conscience and behests not only for the sake of his grandson and daughter. I have also seen in this a *social* aspect. Momun had to make a choice: either—or.

Levchenko: Surely when I talk about human tragedy it does not mean that I am excluding the social aspect. Isn't it part of the tragedy?

Aitmatov: I wanted to show how all the motives are interwoven, including the social ones. I wanted to demonstrate Momun's dependence. I wanted to say that society still has much to do to make him independent, happy and free. This was the first thing.

Second, it is hard for me to single out any one of the classics: apparently the time has come when they comprise a single vast experience—Tolstoy, Chekhov, Dostoyevsky and Western classics. That is why I think of the classics like the Sun. The Sun gives off light (one Sun to me contains Thomas Mann, Shakespeare and Dostoyevsky), but the way its beams reach me is not so important.

Levchenko: When you use the words "traditions" and "innovation" what do you mean by them?

Aitmatov: I think that is self-evident. If a story is well written it has to be innovative.

I really like Rasputin. I enjoy reading him, but I don't know whether he is innovative or not. I suppose he is.

Levchenko: In what way can a person be innovative today? In poetics? In the choice of subject? It seems everything has already been said since antiquity.

Aitmatov: We are attracted to antiquity because we are inquisitive. I do not think that people read Homer's *Odyssey* in one sitting. We find it strange to explain people's conduct with the help of gods. Literature becomes more complex as does life. *Don Quixote* is regarded as a parody...

Levchenko: It was written as a parody of a tale of chivalry...

Aitmatov: Yes, that is common knowledge. But my point is different. A modern writer simply will not write like that.

Levchenko: Although perhaps he or she will not write better.

Aitmatov: Yes, maybe worse, but different. Modern literature is much more interesting to me. And it is innovative. That is even evident today.

Of course, we do not write as brilliantly as Pushkin. But new aspects, new approaches have been developed in dealing with aesthetic and social problems. The subject matter of literature has expanded, although the eternal and fundamental problems have remained.

Let us think about it: did Soviet writers of the 1920s face the same social and artistic problems? In one sense, yes, they did—the same eternal problems remained in

the *new* social and historical conditions. But in another sense, life develops, becomes more complex, poses new *problems* unknown *before*, but relevant in the 1970s. At any rate, far from all the problems that Trifonov deals with also existed for Serafimovich. It is only understandable. Conditions then were different, people were different and material well-being was understood in a different way—it was a time of class struggle. It is no wonder that the class enemy in Serafimovich's stories was a stereotyped character that was depicted in conventional ways. Or let's take Sholokhov's Listnitsky. After Grigory Melekhov whipped him we do not delve any more into Listnitsky's soul. Anyway there's no need to. The same is true of the class enemies in *The Virgin Soil Upturned*—everything about them is clear from the outset. But many years later Zalygin took us back to those times and shows us what was not and could not have been fathomed then.

Levchenko: What about Vasily Belov's *The Eves?* It was also written after the fact, and was also an attempt to understand collectivization according to the laws of our times and taking into account subsequent developments.

Aitmatov: Future writers will probably produce better books than what we are writing today. After all, the past is like water with a sediment that has settled to the bottom. A turbid solution becomes clear when something falls and something else dissolves, when everything comes into place.

If we are talking about the present then it is necessary to take into account what *limitations* are set on a writer by reality, and not only limitations. It is also necessary to examine the objectives that reality puts before the writer.

When I say that life is developing I mean very different things. For instance, the Peace Program.[7] It is not just a political matter but a new page in the history of humankind that forces us to reexamine an array of problems—historical, philosophical and social. One of them is the interpretation of humanism. On the one hand, even today we are against interpreting humanism in abstract terms, out of social context. But on the other hand, we interpret humanism in broader terms than in the past.

I think that this is also understood today by many writers in other countries, including prominent writers such as Kurt Vonnegut and Gabriel García Marquez.

They, as well as ourselves, are urging us to seek common ground. This does not mean, of course, that we are undergoing some ideological transformation, that the era of convergence has begun. No. However a new historical period is definitely under way. The first step has been taken: despite all national, social and ethnic differences we are trying to find a common approach to *universal* problems, such as the problems of war and peace. After all, we realize the danger is not only that one country can attack another, but that our entire civilization can be destroyed. I would like to depict our situation in the following parable. If several people find themselves in the sea and each one of them floats on his or her own log, they will all perish. They should come together and make a raft out of all their logs. Then they will have a better chance of survival. And they will have less of a chance if they try to take each other's logs away.

I would like to say again that the world today is based on new principles—new principles of cultural communication are developing. Therefore new aspects are appearing in each of our creative endeavors.

Last year I was in Turkey. Incidentally, I was very impressed with Turkish literature. In Eastern countries, especially against the background of Arabic and Iranian literature, Turkish literature is seeing a great upsurge. Why is that?

In the beginning of our conversation you mentioned Daglarca. He is a great writer. And he is an activist. In Turkey social issues are raised by a number of writers, reflecting the spirit of the intelligentsia and youth.

I saw how people there talked about socialism as an inevitable path of development for all peoples because capitalism's potentials have been exhausted. They feel that socialism is the future. This is the belief of such Turkish writers as Yasar Kemal, Aziz Nesin and Bekir Yaldyz.

Kemal's new novel is being printed unabridged in serial form in Turkish newspapers, indicating that literature has become a vital need among the people. I would explain this great interest by the fact that a struggle is developing in the society which is electrified by social ideas. This is not the case in Iran, nor in Arab countries. Ethnic problems in these countries are of greater concern than social struggle.

I would say that among the greatest poets of our times are Pablo Neruda and Nazim Hikmet. They are significant

landmarks in modern world literature and their lives are instructive.

Nazim Hikmet is now widely published in Turkey. He is a symbol of modern Turkish culture. Every newspaper and magazine feels it is an honor to print articles about him. His poetry is also our common heritage. Turkish culture cannot ignore Hikmet, not even the most reactionary newspapers.

I think we will be learning more about Turkish literature which represents the fascinating history and life of a nation with a population of 40 million. It is literature that deals with the most poignant social problems.

Levchenko: Do you go to Turkey often?

Aitmatov: I have met and talked to many Turkish cultural figures. But I have only been to Turkey once. My works are published there often. Right now *The Ascention to Mt. Fuji*[8] is being staged and *The Cranes Fly Early* is being published. Eight editions of my books have come out in Turkey.

Levchenko: Do you read Turkish?

Aitmatov: I read letters from friends and answer them in Turkish. And I read the newspapers (reading newspapers is not the same as reading novels). I know the language well enough so that in conversations I can get a good idea of the literature, the country and the social struggle under way there.

Levchenko: Getting back to the image of the Sun symbolizing the totality of the cultural experience of peoples that have influenced you, your works could be viewed as a product of the internationalism of cultures. Besides, you are a bilingual writer.

Aitmatov: My case is, indeed, an example of the merging of two cultures. As time goes on I see all the more that Russian literature and the Russian language—combined with my Kirghiz cultural background—have influenced me. Kirghiz literature, drama and prose, developed before I started writing, especially folk myths and legends. These two streams, two cultures—*Russian and Kirghiz*—have merged and are running in one direction.

We know that many interesting phenomena occur on the bridge between two cultures. One of them is *bilingual* writers who know two languages equally well. This is on the one hand. On the other hand, less interesting processes develop as well, although they are also significant in their own way. For instance, there are writers who are not Russians but they write only in the Rus-

sian language. One such writer is Olzhas Suleimenov.

I think that if Suleimenov also wrote in the Kazakh literary language he would be doubly interesting. I am not criticizing him. These things depend on life's circumstances. I am simply thinking in theoretical terms. It would be good if a fine poet would also write in Kazakh with the same talent, a poet with a cross-cultural mentality.

Bilingualism is also developing in the literature of other peoples. This phenomenon should be regarded with sensitivity and its equital development facilitated to the utmost. The writer must know fluently the languages used in everyday life and in literature. Bilingualism can be extremely fruitful when one's native language is developed and used along with Russian.

Bilingualism is a new form of ethnic culture: an ethnic culture cannot exist without its language.

We must take a sensible approach, taking into account people's multifaceted interests. Bilingualism should promote the development of ethnic cultures, not the opposite. After all, the language of any people is a unique treasure created by the genius of the people. Languages can disappear; many already have. But it is unlikely that new ones will be created. The time when languages originated is gone forever. We must preserve what we have. The languages of the world are our shared heritage.

Internationalism is above all mutual assistance and interaction on the basis of ideological unity. The more developed culture takes it upon itself to help another culture.

One example of practical, clear and genuine assistance was the development of Kirghiz moviemaking. Fifteen years ago young moviemakers came to Kirghizia from Moscow and Leningrad to help us get a movie industry under way. Due to the experience and education gained at the USSR Institute of Cinematography[9], and to assistance from Russian movie directors, Kirghizia now has its own film industry.

Another example is scientific assistance related to the publication of a dictionary of ancient Turkic. Several years ago some Leningrad scholars came out with a monumental work—a dictionary of ancient Turkic used between the 7th and 11th centuries. It is no exaggeration to say that it was a heroic feat performed by Russian Turkic scholars.

There was a time when Turkic peoples lived across the

wide expanses of Siberia. They had their own culture and written language which was preserved in inscriptions, chronicles and books found near the Orkhon and Yenisei rivers. After the Mongol-Tatar invasion, all these peoples were scattered all over the world. It took Russian scholars exactly one hundred years to collect and decipher the ancient inscriptions. The dictionary contains over 20,000 words and phrases translated into Russian. Russian scholars returned to us the lost language of our ancestors. This is a profoundly internationalist endeavor. This is our wealth returned to us—translations of Buddhist texts, Manichaean and Christian books, translations from Chinese and Persian sources into the ancient Uigur language, the many Zoroastrian texts, Yusuf Balasaghun's poem *Kutadgu Bilig* (Knowledge That Gives Happiness), which laid the foundations for Turkic written poetry and the 11th century dictionary by Mahmud al-Kašgaris. Now as far as I'm concerned that is a fine example of internationalism! Every letter was deciphered. Where else could such things happen?

Levchenko: You first wrote *Mother Earth* and *Face to Face* in Kirghiz, then translated them into Russian. But you wrote *The White Ship, Farewell, Gyulsary!* and *The Cranes Fly Early* in Russian. Why do you write in Russian in one case, and Kirghiz in another?

Aitmatov: I went to two kinds of schools. First a Kirghiz school, then Russian. After that I went back to a Kirghiz school, then again to a Russian one. Later I went to a vocational school, an institute, and took courses in Moscow. So my study of the two languages went back and forth. That is why I can write in Russian and translate what I have written into Kirghiz.

Levchenko: Excuse me for changing the subject so abruptly, but what problems do you have in adapting your stories for the screen? As a writer what do you like about film, and do you think your stories lose much when they are made into movies?

Aitmatov: I'd like to preface my answer. No ethnic culture today is complete without a *movie industry*. Modern culture is hard to imagine without moviemaking. Movies have a direct impact on people because of their mass appeal and because they make literature visual.

Levchenko: People say that moviemaking has its own laws. However that philosophy is usually used to justify a director who takes liberties with a literary work. The essence of any literary work is nearly always distorted

when it is made into a movie, and not only in that case. Many classical works of prose are also staged in the theater. Why is that? Because there are not any good modern plays being written today? Yes! Is that why stage directors produce whatever is "handier," assuming that the dividing line between different types of art vacillates and that it causes no harm to cross over the line, they turn novels into drama, poems into ballet, novels into poetry and opera? For instance, not so long ago Benjamin Britten turned Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* into an opera (I'm not passing judgment, only pointing out a principle).

Then there is Bach arranged by Louis Armstrong! I agree that Armstrong did a brilliant job, but why Bach?!

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in *Laokoon* warned us against such boldness when he said a poet makes a big mistake by borrowing a subject from an artist, and an artist makes a big mistake when painting according to a poet's description. There are subjects for paintings and subjects for poems. By the same token there are subjects and stories that are not made for staging. Therefore a work of art cannot help but lose something when "translated" from one form to another: no one can find a color, for instance, that can adequately express spoken words. You know, of course, how Nikolai Gogol and Gustave Flaubert were adamantly against having any illustrations in their books. What would they have to say about movies?!

Aitmatov: I'm also against illustrations; I think they are mainly for children. I do not regard movies as illustrations. What's most important is that the actors are *living* people and should take pains to convey the *essence* of the story.

Levchenko: When you read a book yourself you always visualize the hero more precisely, but in a movie the image is imposed on the viewer.

Aitmatov: I may imagine a hero one way, but the main thing is to get across the essence. Just because I imagine the protagonist one way and you another way does not mean we should reject moviemaking.

If a modern filmmaker is a ship that has a mast, rudder and rigging, literature is the ship's engine. This is especially true today.

Out of one hundred bad movie adaptations there may be one great work of art. This is what I am always hoping for.

Levchenko: What do you consider your most successful film undertakings?
Aitmatov: The White Ship and *The Red Apple.*
Levchenko: How would you express your opinion of the world, what do you like and don't like? Do you think about these things when you're writing? Or do you judge your characters unconsciously?
Aitmatov: I don't think it is possible to fully comprehend your protagonists by means of pure reason. As for the best way of accomplishing this, I have found that it is by describing the principal character in the third person. This way you can pass judgement yourself. You can reproduce the reality most fully, whereas in the first person you are limited.
Levchenko: How much does a writer's own experience have to do with making a hero believable?
Aitmatov: It depends on the hero.
Levchenko: For instance, Ismail in *Face to Face.*
Aitmatov: In that case, of course, you have to ask people a lot of questions, compare what you have heard and do some other investigating.
Levchenko: When do you rely on your imagination? Whenever you have not found something out or experienced it yourself?
Aitmatov: Writers have to be actors at heart. They have to be very observant. But writers are not saints or angels; they have complex personalities that lead them into diverse modes of behavior. However, through their art they strive for perfection. That is the main thing. Of course it is wonderful when the writer's *real* life coincides with the *ideal.* But that is not a law, not like two times two is four. It is a very complicated problem. The calculations here are according to the rules of higher mathematics.
Levchenko: What does art give you most of all: the possibility of confessing or of professing various truths, ideas and convictions? Of course, both are inseparably connected; confession can also be instructive. But I would like to know what inner motives you have for writing.
Aitmatov: I think that confessing should supplement professing, and vice versa.

I really love music. It stirs such subtle and elusive emotions that are hard to describe, concretize, express in words. That is probably why they do not lend themselves to criticism. No matter who talks about music, the com-

ments are always based on intuition and on feelings. A critic can only really say whether he or she likes the music or not. It is easier to express literature in scientific terms, definitions and words. Nearly all of us believe we are experts in judging literature. We are more respectful when it comes to music.

But literature also has its advantages. In it people can express themselves more fully, more polyphonically. I will say it even more strongly—only prose can recreate *life* and *history*. This is especially true of realism which is the crown of any art; its trunk. Realism has big advantages because other methods in art have many conditions (we have agreed upon them), and only realist prose has no such conditions. You cannot talk only about yourself in such prose; at all times, even when you are confessing, you are talking more about the world. Yet when I write I want to put across *my* thoughts about life and my feelings. I want my readers to see themselves in my stories.

Levchenko: What role does the hero play in getting across your ideas? Some critics say that the trend in literature today is not so much to pose heroes and anti-heroes as to study the good and bad in people. Momun[10] and Choro[11] are cases in point.

Aitmatov: I put my own thoughts into my principal character; I not only like him but must fight for him. But he has different qualities and is beset by a complicated inner conflict. Therefore I do not think a writer should attempt to didactically criticize or praise a good agronomist or a bad collective farm chairman, an excellent worker or a despicable alcoholic. First, that is not the goal of literature. Second, what critics mean by a "hero" is often simplistic.

I do not want to argue with the critics, but I get confused when we use a commonplace word to describe something sacred and dear to us.

This sacred thing can be manifested in many ways, and each time we use one and the same word for it—"hero." Is that right? After all, sacred things vary—for me it can be a woman, love, heroism, honesty or a challenge.

Levchenko: Othello, Manfred, Faust, Onegin and Pechorin could hardly be called "heroes," but we like them just the same.

Aitmatov: If the main character is not a strong *personality*, no matter what his good deeds are, the reader will not be drawn to him. At best he will turn out to be

a nice icon. But the individuals you mentioned are contradictory, strong and filled with inner wealth.

The point is that along with indisputable or, as they say, ideal heroes, there have always been people who could not, for one or another reason, fulfil their potential. Literature is meant to study the individual in the context of the social environment, taking into account all the social and economic conditions. One such character was the Gadfly who did a heroic deed and called others to follow his example.

Levchenko: Your Duishen also belongs in that category. Of course, Duishen is an unquestionable example to be followed. But in my opinion, your Tanabai is no worse an example, if not to be followed, then to be pondered: after all, Tanabai is a "hero" (I remember that the writer, Georgi Radov, even called him an intellectual hero), although not a model hero, and perhaps for that reason he is more likable and human. And Duishen is someone we cannot be like, anymore than we can be like the legendary Manas who is endowed with qualities that mortals lack completely or almost completely.

Aitmatov: Indeed, there is also another type of character in literature, such as Melekhov[12] or Myshkin[13]. They also undergo a crystalization of good, honesty and uncompromising attitudes. Therefore I think that the purpose of art is to take a close interest in man, call attention to him, and encourage a desire to understand and respect him in all his infinite diversity.

Here I would like to say something about the *evolution* of the hero in literature. I think that what was typical in the early years after the revolution, what reflected the romantic upsurge of the times, what astounded and defied the imagination has dropped into the background as society was developing and becoming more complex.

From romanticism, with its strong, relentless and ideal heroes, we have turned to purely down-to-earth, profound realism. Critics who want us to reverse the trend are making a mistake.

Nor are the readers right who cling to their former attitudes. A writer should not try to please them. In *Notes About Myself* I wrote that some readers who liked *Jamila*, *Duishen*, *Mother Earth* and other stories prefer me to continue writing in that vein, clinging to their notions of art. I do not deny the significance of what I did before *Farewell, Gyulsary!* and *The White Ship*, but I do not intend to stop there. Literature should

selflessly carry its cross and delve into life's complexities so that man will know and love all the best qualities in himself, in other people and in society. And not only love them, but be concerned about them and fight for them.

Of course, it is hard to blame readers—their taste was formed under the influence of many circumstances. However the future development of our literature also demands that they make some effort too. From the didactic form of literature we are changing to the analytical nature of narration. We must probe deep into human nature in order to reveal it more completely, without concealing its weaknesses and contradictions. Unfortunately, people can say we do not understand the evolution of the hero in literature. But there is no way to avoid criticism. It is impossible to please everybody. All we can do is hang on to our pens and keep on working.

1976

Heinz Plavius, a leading critic in the German Democratic Republic, came to Frunze to interview one of the Soviet Union's leading writers for the *Weimarer Beitrage*, a magazine of literary reviews, one of the most popular in the German Democratic Republic. Chinghiz Aitmatov's books are as well known there as they are in the Soviet Union. The largest publishing house in the GDR, Volk und Welt, has published 438,700 copies of eight Aitmatov titles. Among them is a superb two-volume edition. Volk und Welt has also sold publication rights to Reklam, Verlag der Nation, and Kinderbuch-Verlag to print 760,000 copies of Aitmatov's books in fifteen editions.

The interview lasted many hours over a period of several days. Their conversation dealt with not only Aitmatov's writing, but also with a wide range of issues regarding literature in the USSR, the German Democratic Republic, and contemporary world literature. They understood each other with ease: Plavius is the author of a number of books and articles on German literature and aesthetics, and studied in the Soviet Union for several years. His first work, about Hegel, was published in the USSR. Naturally, he not only knows Russian well, but also Soviet literature.

Plavius transcribed their taperecorded conversation into German for the *Weimarer Beitrage*, where it was printed in full in the issue devoted to the 60th anniversary of the 1917 socialist revolution. *Novy mir* thought the conversation would be extremely interesting to Soviet readers, so with the permission of both men, most of it was translated from German into Russian.

Plavius: I would like to start by conveying greetings and best wishes from the large community of Aitmatov's fans in the German Democratic Republic. As vivid evidence of this, I have a number of questions which I would like to ask you on behalf of my many colleagues, includ-

ing the editorial staff of the *Weimarer Beitrage*. I refer to my colleagues in order to stress that I am not motivated by a superficial interest, but the conviction that the similarities between our cultures and literatures have increased so much that your problems are now our problems. If in our conversation I am able at least to some extent make our problems yours, it would be mutually useful.

Allow me to first define the actual subject matter of our conversation: the problems of prose, its current status and the factors that influence it in the 1970s.

The most common opinion expressed in literary discussions (or a whole number of shades of this opinion) is that in contemporary literature, including prose, of course, a number of substantial changes can be observed. Although I have in mind very different writers, I would still like to name some authors and their works in order to make our conversation more concrete. In Soviet literature, along with your works, I would like to mention books by Trifonov, Rasputin, Tendryakov, Granin and Astafiev. In literature of the GDR—Christa Wolf, Kant, Strittmatter, Wellm, Pietschmann and Keller.

I do not want to lump these authors into one group. But the changes under way are clearly evident in their writings.

When people talk about the special features of the 1970s they usually refer to the flow of information, the effects of the scientific and technological revolution, etc.

However I think even more profound are the consequences of the changes in the nature of labor stemming from the sharp increase in technology in work processes. Consequently, changes are also occurring in lifestyle; a new mentality is developing which directly influences literature. The mode of production is changing and the direct link between the individual and the objects of his labor, a characteristic of manual labor, is becoming ever more indirect. The need is arising for new factors linking the individual with his environment.

It is possible, for instance, that camping is an unconscious reaction to these processes, since in this case not only a higher living standard and the need for relaxation are influential factors, but also the desire to get closer to the nature. Art reacts similarly to this new situation. Art tells people about the need for close contact both with today's world at large and the world

of traditions; it tells them through elements of reflection, the use of myths and by frequently turning to art as a subject of portrayal.

Another set of problems that has brought about tangible changes in prose stems from the growing role of science which is becoming increasingly involved in social problems that are unfathomable to the "uninitiated." This also applies to most of the problems dealt with by philosophers, biologists and sociologists. I believe that a certain blank spot has emerged as a result of such development. Some extremely important issues related to the life and death of the ordinary person have not been dealt with. In the Middle Ages these issues were resolved by religion; in the Age of Enlightenment religion was replaced in this respect by philosophy. It is my feeling that in the current situation a similar role is being increasingly played by art, particularly prose.

Aitmatov: If our conversation goes in this direction it promises to be quite interesting, because modern literature and art embrace nearly everything that people care about today—their daily life, spiritual and social world. I think you are correct about the important features of modern intellectual life. Science today is so specialized that it is no longer accessible to all. At the same time there is a growing need to see the world in unity, as something that is whole, where even remote spheres are interrelated. In the past, studies of those kind of long-term ties was the realm of religion and philosophy, whereas today it is increasingly the mission of literature and, above all, prose, although not only prose. Naturally we should not set narrow boundaries; we cannot ignore the theater, films, literary criticism, etc.

The priority task is to fathom our own life: we are the ones, not those who will come after us, who must say who and what we are in the 1970s, what society is like, what the dynamics are of this integrity in conditions of coexistence between two opposite social systems, and explain the living dialectics of socialism. And finally, we must describe man.

Literature has always strived to think in global terms while realizing that its cornerstone is the individual. This is the very essence of the essence.

An individual can be compared to a focus in which all the factors of reality are concentrated; studying these factors helps us understand through man the content, essence and trends of the times. Perhaps all this sounds

abstract, but this is precisely the aim of intelligent and serious prose. The major and decisive trends in the development of literature are most clearly seen in the works of great writers. Brecht is just one example. I mention him because he accepted the new era, the era of socialism, with profound human understanding and was able to reflect in his art the inner drama of the era.

But I would first like to interrupt our discussion of general questions and say a few words about the reader in the German Democratic Republic—a concrete well-read person. The two of us must realize that the GDR constitutes a completely new historical phenomenon as a state and as a society. The GDR is on the border between two worlds. Therefore the general view of the world has special features there. The best creations of the human spirit have come from the German people, which also means from the GDR. The period of socio-historic tranformations began when the German Democratic Republic was established. Our common goal, to build a new society, puts us together in the same ranks. On the other hand, I would not want you to be just like me. We need variety because it enriches us and multiplies our creative potential.

Hence we writers and artists should think very seriously about what the new potentials of literature and art are, what we can expect of our art, how it should talk and what it should say to fathom the inimitable significance of our time and accomplish what we were for one reason or another unable to do in the past.

No society, including a socialist society, can create ideal conditions for the development of art. Only natural, not distilled water can quench creative thirst.

We clearly see the basic differences between the Western socio-economic system and our socialist society. The most important difference is that our people have a developed sense of self-respect. Perhaps the level of material well-being is not yet equal to that of the average person in a capitalist country. But our people do not have to kowtow to some boss. They know that society relies primarily on them and that no executive can get anywhere without them.

That is what is most important and this is good.

The viability of literature is gauged, for one, by the extent to which it penetrates the very essence of the contradictions of social development, including the progress of our socialist society...

Plavius: Could I interrupt you for a moment? I would like to thank you, first of all, for what you said about the GDR. I am very happy that our first meeting coincided with the anniversary of the formation of the GDR.
Aitmatov: That makes it all the more pleasant. Best wishes to you on this holiday.
Plavius: We were talking about the connection between literature and philosophy, or more precisely, the penetration of the latter into the former. In my opinion this connection has become noticeably weaker, which signifies a retreat from one of our good traditions. Close contacts existed between literature and the philosophy of the Enlightenment, classicism and romanticism. Without going too far back into the history of literature, let us take Brecht for example. He was not only a playwright or lyricist, but also a thinker. And not only in his theoretical works, but also in his dramas and prose.

Looking at our socialist system, what connection do you see between literature and philosophy?
Aitmatov: I think it is still early to talk about this as a resolved problem. As far as I can see it is far from a simple matter. In order for strong ties to develop between fiction and philosophy some period of historical time must pass. After every revolution, life in a society begins on a completely new basis. Everything changes. New patterns and new relationships come into being.

In this early stage, literature, including prose, is much more emotional than philosophical; it is more inclined to be descriptive in an emotional and often simplistic style. It tells about what is new, praises the upheaval and the heroism which is partially spontaneous and partially conscious, describes the destruction of the old and the first efforts in building the new.

All this—both real events and their reflection in literature—remains to be analyzed philosophically.

On the other hand, when a new society is being born many things are more clear. You know exactly who your friends are and who your irreconcilable enemies are that have to be defeated. You know that industrialization is urgent, which means you have to build factories and plants....

Today's stable society is more complex. You see a variegated intertwining of factors that must be analyzed and studied. You keep coming back to the question of man, what he is in the 1970s and how he became that way.

When literature must deal with such questions, it can no longer rely on the arsenal of artistic means it had at the beginning. Being well aware of its law-governed nature, I certainly do not mean to abuse the beginning period.

Plavius: Without which we would not be where we are today.

Aitmatov: Exactly. These are the laws of development. Of course we have made a point of preserving the ideological principles declared in the beginning and that are the foundation of our society as a whole. The social ideas that we all value have been preserved and further developed, but against the background of these ideas a process is under way of differentiation in general, in all spheres of society. The spiritual makeup of our contemporaries has also become more complex. Here is just an elementary example. Thirty years ago (not to mention fifty) the term "environmental protection" simply did not exist. No one could have even dreamed of it. Nature, land and water—we had plenty of it all. People were not yet beset by the doubts and anxieties they have today. And what about schools and the problems of educating the young...

Plavius: On the way here I read Tendryakov's story *Graduation Night*.

Aitmatov: It deals exactly with these problems. Today everything having to do with teaching and education are tightly interwoven, and the young even influence their teachers. Let's go a step farther. The scientific and technological revolution is attended by the information boom. No other generation has been so well informed.

International contacts have never been as developed as they are today. Here is just one example: before you arrived I was visited by Antonioni; Hungarians came before him, and Japanese were here before them. Even in Kirghizia, in our small republic, we feel on a daily basis the rhythm of contemporary life; we are conscious of our connection with the world and are in touch with it.

All this, of course, cannot but demand from literature an expanded philosophical range. Today literature must present a complex view of the world and a broad, detailed portrayal of the mentality of our contemporaries.

When literature, prose, succeeds in this it has genuine power over the reader. In my opinion, the works of

Thomas Mann are among the best examples. I like reading not only his novels, but his letters. He is one of those great writers who does not fit into any category. One would think that he should be followed by someone even greater, in the spirit, as it were, of progress. But progress in this respect is still not evident. I do not want to say that we are seeing regress, but the leap forward has not been sufficient; it could only be done by someone as great as Mann. However, that writer will not be another Thomas Mann, but radically different.

Plavius: I'd like to say a few words about this... I am against schematizing things, but putting it in simpler terms, literary works are of different calibers. On the one hand there are writers like Thomas Mann who are great thinkers and pioneers. This literature ploughs through virgin land. It is followed by—and that is not connected with moral-aesthetic vices—literature...

Aitmatov: It is followed by imitators in the good sense of the word.

Plavius: Yes, literature that uses these great discoveries and sees to it that they become generally accessible. I believe that neither "caliber" of literature can exist without the other.

It is necessary to see how they are interrelated and not exclaim "Hosanna!" in one case and "Crucify" in another.

Aitmatov: What you're talking about can be easily seen in Soviet literature. We have such aces as Sholokhov, Leonov, Pasternak and Mayakovsky. There is nothing comparable among new generations of writers. There are many interesting and superb novelists and poets who for the most part draw on the experience of great writers.

Plavius: Another reason for the differentiation of literature is connected with the diverse needs of the readers. Not everyone should or will read Thomas Mann.

Aitmatov: That's right. I agree with you completely. That is the way things are.

But we should go farther. There is still third and fourth rate literature. It is totally descriptive literature which in the West is prompted by spontaneous market demand. This kind of literature in our country gets by with its low level because the subject is timely. I think it's an open question whether or not such books are useful or harmful. You can't have a forest without shrubs, and the same principle applies to literature. Along with genuinely capable artists there will always be craftsmen

in the field of writing. They also have a degree of influence. Sometimes the conditions for them are favorable, although no one makes them that way deliberately. "Lightweight" works, being the most easily "transportable" for the mass media, especially TV, are widespread and a kind of public opinion develops around them. What can I say? That's life...

Plavius: Of course we have to take it as we find it, but we must also speak about this.

Aitmatov: You're right. I would like our press to print more poignant articles about current literature, and not only when these works reflect ideological qualities we don't like, but also when they are bland and voguish.

Plavius: After talking to many writers I have found that there are two types. Some are incapable of writing about a "necessary" subject suggested by someone else, and others are not. It has nothing to do with the writer's aesthetic maturity or lack of ability. I would like to recall what Franz Fühmann once advised young writers—don't begin writing if you don't feel that you must write on this subject.

Aitmatov: Art, like any worthwhile meeting, has its agenda. If we're talking about socialist art the first point on the agenda is to depict the working class. That is how it should be because this section of society produces material wealth and its work constitutes the basis of our socialist organization. However the agenda is one thing and the speakers are quite another. It is up to us to approve the agenda, but not what the speakers say. Each person has to decide whether he or she is prepared for this point...

Plavius: We have observed again and again that reviewers have been easy on writers only because of the subject chosen was highly topical.

Aitmatov: Not the choice of subject but how it is dealt with is what counts.

Plavius: That's because when it is done poorly it is merely a statement of the subject, not art. I think that the difficulty in writing about an "industrial" subject is due to the fact that historically speaking the subject is still very young. Besides, the subject is inevitably connected with such important issues as the historical mission of the working class.

Aitmatov: Yes, in broad historical terms, art in our society, as society itself, is in its early stage of development. From the viewpoint of history what is fifty or

sixty years? Of course, incredible progress has been made in this time. But we should never forget that we started something completely new, something that no one had ever tried before, yet we want to make as few mistakes as possible. Hence our extra caution whenever we need to say that something written about a "topical" subject is artistically weak.

What we often lack in our writings about contemporary life is an attempt to deal with great ideas and processes and depict them with artistic depth and in a multifaceted way.

Thomas Mann has an article titled "Lubeck as a Form of Spiritual Life." The title itself contains an exceptionally perceptible image. I don't think that "Lubeck" (in the broad sense of the word) has to be a definite geographic place, although I do have such a place—my home village of Sheker. But he is not talking about a social or geographical form of life. He is saying that a spiritual form of life is developing that nourishes talent under the influence of traditions, a certain social level, practical and intellectual experience, and the changing processes in the world that we are involved in and witnessing. All authors have their sources and ties and should work in accordance with their abilities.

Significant stories about the working class do not appear because of our passionate pleas, but only when the subject itself fits the writer's inner inclinations and experience.

The creation of serious works that are profound in their realism depends on the cultural climate throughout society and among the working class. This means that without weakening the writers' necessary ties with workplaces, we should persistently promote the cultural and literary potential of all the people. This is difficult to do with only good intentions. I used the word "climate" deliberately. A favorable climate when it comes to both minor and major questions is a decisive condition for the flourishing of art.

Plavius: At a meeting of writers Franz Fühmann talked about his observations of coal miners' lives. They speak one way among themselves, but when they are in the boss's office or on a platform addressing a crowd their style of speech changes immediately. It is as if they make a transition from one environment to another. In such cases don't we see the individual fitting into a standard pattern, the splitting of a single language into two?

Aitmatov: I think that such differentiation is only natural: in this respect both life and art speak in "different" languages. No one would think of using the medium of ballet to show how a worker goes into a boss's office to talk about his or her accomplishments on the job. Ballet has its own sphere, its own element—legends, fairy tales and the expression of feelings that cannot be concretized in a completely realistic manner.

There's nothing surprising about what Fühmann said. In everyday conversations coal miners swear and send each other to hell. That's only normal. According to the rules of social etiquette they behave differently when it comes to public affairs. In each sphere their behavior is realistic in its own way. But apparently Fühmann wanted to make another point as well—that when people are under public scrutiny they try to create a certain impression and project the necessary image. That has always been the case. We meet up with many such figures in classical literature.

It would be strange to deny the vitality of such a phenomenon in our conditions as well. We risk being unrealistic by not recognizing the phenomenon and ignoring it in our works.

Plavius: I would like to get back to the question of the features of prose in the 1970s. Perhaps we can define them more concretely.

Aitmatov: Let's try. I think it is important to appraise our literary experience from a historical viewpoint, taking into account that humankind and its spiritual culture is improving all the time. Progress and perfection are especially evident in the field of literary technique and skill. But the same also goes for artistic content (let us recall, for instance, the habit of early prose writers of making the whole plot clear in the title or subtitle, eliminating the need to read the book). When we talk about modern prose—I mean the best prose around the world—we must recognize that it is, with increasing sensitivity, capturing life's immediate advances, the most complicated dialectics of personal relationships, portraying reality precisely and aptly and striving to discover and express the innermost human feelings.

Literature aspired to this in the past as well. But it was sometimes prevented from being totally natural because of ossified conventions. For instance, in drama the hero's thoughts were conveyed by side remarks. Prose was also distinguished by such mechanical features.

Today we know the importance of inner development and concealed messages.

Plavius: When you talked about the early stage of our literature you used the word "descriptive." This term is also a subject of discussion here. I have tried to use it in some of my articles in order to qualify different levels in literature. It stirred a negative reaction in some people.

Aitmatov: Why is that?

Plavius: Perhaps I did not differentiate adequately when I used the word. Description is perhaps a transitional stage toward genuine profound realism. When Lenin talked about the cognition of new things he pointed out that any process of cognition begins from the exterior. The study of exterior layers and surfaces necessarily leads to description.

Aitmatov: Here is an example. We have all read Nikolai Ostrovsky's *How the Steel Was Tempered*, and we regard the novel as a classic of Soviet literature. We were brought up on the book which influenced our ethical and spiritual development. We all know about Ostrovsky's hard life and the difficult circumstances under which he wrote his novel. But all that aside, if we judge him as a writer in terms of his language and imagery, we see that literature has advanced beyond that. Since what we're talking about is a logical process, there is no reason to take what I'm saying as an affront to Ostrovsky whose significance, of course, is intransient. However the traditional mode of sequential description is probably not enough for the mature reader. The resources for description are limited; it is incapable of giving us a feeling for all the complexities of our reality. Hence multifaceted psychologism in the approach to man taken by modern writers.

Recently I had the opportunity of addressing a conference of young writers from Asia and Africa held in Tashkent. In my presentation I tried to substantiate the thesis of the unlimited potential of man as the main object of art.

Our writers have a lot to do in the study of the human spirit in order to reach the heights, say, of the giants of critical realism, to be as strong and influential as they are.

Plavius: I think we should more precisely define the current stage of development of socialist realism which has become one of the most important trends in world art in the decades of its existence. This is also very important

in connection with those general traits that are evident in the development of the arts in the socialist countries.

We' ve already talked about the first period of development in our literature and we agreed that it laid the necessary groundwork for further progress. I think that we are now in the middle of the second period whose important features you mentioned earlier. I would like to underline one other feature that has been rather clearly defined in the arts of the German Democratic Republic in recent years—the intensive use of past artistic experience and traditions.

Realism as an artistic method is apparently most capable of changing and utilizing past experience. Socialist realism also possesses this ability. Perhaps the modern stage of its development can be defined in this way: against the background of its growing aesthetic sovereignty it absorbs the experience of all world culture. This is, in my opinion, the guarantee of its further ascent.

Aitmatov: I would like to specify. Indeed, socialist realism has the legitimate right to inherit all that came before it. But even more important is its own contribution to the development of literature, what it has gained from its own experience. Furthermore, any periodization is arbitrary and schematizes many things. When such stages are talked about one has the feeling that the processes that are occurring parallel to one another or simultaneously are actually following one another.

Plavius: We can expect that our discussion will prompt a response that will result in more proper answers.

I would like to get back to the special features of literature in recent years. Not long ago you told an interviewer for *Voprosy literatury* that "...only prose, especially realist prose, can *recreate* life or history. It is the crown of art."[1]

I am afraid that the traits of naturalism and mediocrity that we have already talked about are given certain theoretical backing. Remember the definition of realism as a reflection, reproduction of life in the forms of life itself. When we use the term "reproduction" perhaps we push literature into passive description?

Aitmatov: No term can be used out of context. When we say "reproduction" we also mean the element of abstract thought and ideas. Reality cannot be mechanically reproduced. I find or invent images. When you read these imaginary symbols you imagine a picture of real life. Looking at it that way we see that prose has the

most abilities, if for no other reason than it is not connected with such conditions of "form" as meter and rhythm. And, of course, it is necessary to take into account that prose is very close to human thought processes, to ordinary daily consciousness and stream of consciousness, although not in the modernistic meaning of the term.

Plavius: You are quoted as saying "only prose." Isn't that too categorical?

Aitmatov: Okay, let's say, primarily prose. The theater, for instance, usually takes a certain aspect of life. Film does this too. Sometimes it can even show what prose cannot. But in the final analysis, when man remains alone with himself, he has a greater need for a book as the foundation of his spiritual self-comprehension, spiritual orientation amidst very complicated questions.

Plavius: In this respect can prose be regarded as the matter of all the arts?

Aitmatov: (after some hesitation) Yes, that's true today. It is a great collector of spiritual energy and a great promoter of man's moral life. I am talking about realistic prose, or rather, that ideal of realistic prose that I would like to see embodied in the development of our socialist literature. I am not convinced by theoreticians who claim that socialist realism is a fixed method of artistic perception and understanding of the world. The method of our art is developing constantly. If we believe that socialist realism is the principal artistic trend of the century then this alone presupposes that it should absorb much from other methods and styles that are developing simultaneously.

Plavius: In relation to this what do you think about the latest art trends in other countries?

Aitmatov: In my opinion it would be wrong to pretend as though the experience of abstractionism does not exist. I was impressed by various works of abstact art that I have seen abroad.

In Washington there is a museum of modern art with a large park. Visitors can learn about the history of art both inside the museum and outside in the park. In front of the museum's entrance there is a sculpture of an elderly man in an old-fashioned coat. Before I went up to it, I spent a long time looking at another sculpture. It was a structure consisting of pieces of large-diameter gas pipes and metal rings that were cut slantwise. It was painted red and stood on a granite base. It affected the whole

setting, the park, the facilities and my mood. Not far away from it was that greenish bronze figure portraying sadness and fatigue. When I came up close I recognized Roden's Balzac. The *combination* of these two figures put me in a state of shock and opened my eyes.

All in all I want to say that when we talk about realism and its veracity, about its "limits," we should understand it creatively and not let it be linear and simplistic.

I remember a scene from Kobo Abe in which the author describes the "thoughts" of the deceased. The murderer claimed that his victim had drowned. The dead man "commented" on the actions of the murderer. This was the line of his thinking: I know that you will start pouring water into me, but you will be very nervous, you will do everything to keep it from looking like murder. But you do not know that when a person drowns plankton gets into the capillary vessels of the lungs. If an autopsy is done thoroughly it will establish that there was no plankton in my lungs.

One could say that a realist writer should not write like that. But Kobo Abe does this in a natural and convincing way.

Plavius: We will find something similar in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez in which those who have been dead for a long time are still characters in the book. This device is a distinctive form for assimilating history.

Aitmatov: Of course. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is an outstanding phenomenon that tells us: friends, leave behind all a priori rules and generally everything that is constraining. Not every prose writer can use such a "find." It doesn't do any good to mechanically borrow such devices. For instance, I will never write like that. I have to write according to my own thought processes, the way I see things. I have to cultivate my own love for human beings.

Plavius: But you are capable of understanding and adopting something that is far from your own manner.

Aitmatov: I think that I am unprejudiced when it comes to accepting someone else's style. But there is a necessary condition of my contact with another writer "unlike" myself: although we may be very different we must have important common ground—the desire to use the written word to defend human individuality. When such common ground exists, everything else can be different, but this writer will not be alien to me.

Plavius: What trends in the modern development of world culture seem especially noteworthy?

Aitmatov: I can hardly say anything new on that; there are specialists who study world art. We are living in an interesting age. Today it is impossible to review everything that is written and everyone who is published. Every country has numerous publishing houses, large and small. All of them put out a sea of books. There is one street in Ankara that has four publishing houses, and each one of them negotiated with me. It is hard to imagine what life would be like without books.

It is generally recognized that in recent years there has been a book boom. And literature itself is developing actively. Thirty years ago there was British, American, French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish literature. They defined the concept of world literature. Today its limits are broader.

Owing to the revolutionary process and the national liberation movement, many peoples have awakened. They are asking the question—"What are we?" They are striving to understand themselves through art.

So many new African writers have appeared. The same is true of moviemaking. Every country in the world today, rich and poor alike, wants to say something in film.

This worldwide upsurge of artistic thought has had diverse results. On the one hand, we are seeing the development of "mass" culture which is being used by certain political forces to distract people from urgent and vital problems. On the other hand, in the world literary process we are seeing that genuinely artistic forces are becoming stronger and more numerous. For instance, Latin American prose constitutes a totally new phenomenon. Ultimately such phenomena are evidence that the positive elements dominate in this process.

Just a few days before you came I sat here at this table talking to Michelangelo Antonioni. He was with an Italian writer and screenwriter, Tonino Guerra, Fellini's coauthor for the film *Amarcord*. We talked about various matters. Antonioni expressed deep concern about young moviemakers. He said that in the West young directors are lonely and isolated. In order to make movies you have to have money. A young director makes an entertaining movie, a thriller or porno film, thinking the money earned will make it possible to do a serious artistic movie. But according to Antonioni,

it is a vicious circle. Concessions to anti-art are not without consequence. A young director who gets a taste of the sweet fruit of easy work simply drifts with the current.

It is extremely rare when strong individuals, talented people manage to get out of this swamp. The same thing holds true for literature.

Plavius: When I examine the prose of recent decades I get the feeling that standards have diminished. Such profound and epic novels like ones written by Hemingway, Faulkner or Thomas Mann appear more rarely.

Aitmatov: I think that the West does not have such high caliber writers today. Of course they are not born every day. On the other hand, based on what I manage to read I think that narrow specialization is under way among writers.

There are increasingly smaller "pieces," although it is obvious that the manner of writing of these "pieces" is more thorough. A writer chooses a small area that is gone over in great detail. So far writers have not reached the caliber of Thomas Mann and Faulkner. At least up to now. Incidentally, Hemingway said that a person must live long to become a great writer, and that's what everyone wants. There is truth in that: maturity comes with age, especially in prose, whose target is to encompass the whole world.

Plavius: I don't want to reduce our conversation to particulars, but would like to point out that Böll's artistic development prompted me to draw the same conclusion. For instance, *Billiard am Halbzehn* is an epically broad novel though not, of course, of the caliber of Thomas Mann. The caliber diminishes in subsequent novels.

Aitmatov: Böll is certainly an interesting writer. Perhaps he is even an example of the kind of narrow specialization I mentioned. Perhaps he is in a period of transition; maybe he will again achieve major successes.

Plavius: I would like to say something else about culture in the West... In the past, the writers of theoretical works used the terms "modernism" and "decadence" right and left. Now you see these words much less.

Aitmatov: What is your explanation for that?

Plavius: Apparently these terms were used so much that they were no longer any help in differentiating real phenomena. But the phenomena still exist.

Aitmatov: We shouldn't be afraid of words. We simply have to clearly understand their implications.

Modernism and decadence reflect certain positions that can be questioned or criticized, avoiding sweeping statements. These trends have their experience and their live elements...

Plavius: If they have such elements it is because many of the "isms" in the beginning of the century originated in protest against the self-satisfied bourgeoisie.

Aitmatov: Perhaps these "isms" arose not so much in protest against the existing society as against the stagnant canons of culture and the arts. When a certain trend in the arts reaches its culmination and then declines it stagnates in dogmas. At this point an "ism" develops that attempts to overcome aesthetic inertia, often proposing an eccentric system of abstract ideas.

Plavius: Let's discuss this concept—abstract ideas.

You mentioned Kobo Abe's abstract device in his novel. We are talking about an artistic means which is based on the assumption that a dead person can talk. If realism is still an element of the author's device, then we can apply to our concrete case the thesis you have put forth: the whole world should be present in prose. If I (a supposition which is not altogether free of banality) relate this thesis directly to the case in question, it turns out that today, perhaps, it would be easy to commit a crime but hard to conceal it; after all, the modern world has a broad range of means and methods (at least in criminology) to get to the bottom of something that is hidden. And there are lots of people who are aware of these means. Therefore readers understand such artistic devices. Generally speaking, these devices are not rejected and are not causing alienation.

These devices are used a great deal in literature in the German Democratic Republic. Recently prose writers have been deliberately employing legends and fairy tales, "as if" situations, widely applying game elements, symbols and parables. In other words, writers take a serious approach to fantasy, an element of any art. In fact these devices are now being used more than ever. If I would seek a tested term for the device of abstract ideas, I would use the German equivalent, Brecht's concept, which could be translated as "estrangement..."

In your interview with Victor Levchenko published in *Voprosy literatury* you said: "Realism has big advantages because other methods in art have many conditions (we have agreed on them), and only realist prose has no such conditions. You cannot talk only about yourself in

such prose; at all times, even when you are confessing, you are talking about the world."

I agree with you about the advantages of realism. But doesn't realism also make use of the abstract? I think we agreed that our realism is steadily expanding its potentials...

Aitmatov: Art is generally inconceivable without fantasy and abstract ideas. Let us take ballet, for instance, in which the elements of estrangement and fantasy are quite strong. It has its canonized features: plasticity, grace, rhythm and pace; passion and melancholy are portrayed only through plasticity of movement. I can conceive of that, although I am always conscious that people in real life do not relate to each other through the medium of dance.

The same thing is true of drama. You go to the theater knowing that when the curtain rises the actors will come out on stage and begin acting. That's why it would be ridiculous to be against fantasy. The important question is the quality of its use.

Plavius: And in what artistic structure.

Aitmatov: Right, in what structure. In prose the zealous use of symbols and parables is far from always beneficial. For instance, I avoid accenting these devices in my novels because they have a "primitivizing" effect.

Plavius: And if it is impossible without them to pursue your artistic design?

Aitmatov: In this case art switches to the language of symbols. But if it is possible to do without them, if the writer finds other means, I think symbols should be avoided. I think that my own early works are a good example—I have no reason to disown them, although they are written, let us say, in a romantic style.

My earlier works have a wide readership. Now that I write in a different style I know from a number of indications that I have less readers. I can't say that I am discouraged by this. After all, my recent novels are above all oriented to the experienced reader. When I say experienced I don't mean just in terms of reading, but mainly in terms of life experience and knowledge of the problems that concern the world.

This is why I try to do without abstract ideas that, by complicating the text, present a primitive picture of the world. In my last novel, *The Skewbald Dog Running Along the Edge of the Sea*, the action takes place at sea. The characters are in a borderline situation. The boat is

the world. It is inconceivable for me to find an approach to the elementary problems of this world with the help of symbols and similar devices. I feel it is my job to test the hero's moral fiber to the utmost.

Essentially all modern prose does that, putting before society the question—to what extent our own conduct corresponds to general demands and our historical mission.

Plavius: I would like to talk about other subjects that are increasingly important to the future development of literature. What is the situation with environmental protection? Or what is being done to deal with the fetishization of things, the mentality of consumerism?

Aitmatov: Both these subjects are extremely important to writers. You know about the developments around the Lake Baikal issue. Specialists and scientists, of course, gave their honored opinion, but the fate of Baikal became a popular campaign only when writers spoke up. A few years ago when I was interviewed for the *Literaturnaya gazeta* I spoke about preserving the natural beauty of the Ferghan Valley. I think that protecting the natural environment is the primary obligation of people in the arts.

As for consumerism, it is a multifaceted problem. Of course, we cannot be neutral to the avidity of philistines. This does not mean, however, that we should promote asceticism. Those who produce material wealth have the right to enjoy it. But where is the point beyond which people become obsessed with things?

In many countries satisfying the material needs of the population is still a serious problem. Who places such issues on a spiritual level? I certainly do not want to put literature above all else, but its specific medium is quite capable of dealing with such problems.

What can be the criterion in literature for determining the one-sidedness of asceticism and the fetishism of well-being? I think it can only be reason. What I mean by reason in this case is a moderate clear-cut principle that rejects a poverty of needs and puts obstacles in the way of over consumption. No matter what approach we take to this problem, at every turn of the road we come up against new demands and new possibilities of modern prose.

Plavius: So far our literature has barely dealt with consumer fetishism, whereas, as far as I know, it is an important theme in Soviet literature, especially in drama and

in the prose, such as the works of Yuri Trifonov. Concrete artistic solutions, in my opinion, are usually polemical when it comes to petty bourgeois attitudes that have been prompted by the higher standard of living. The dialectics of relations between the individual and society are often violated to the detriment of society. Sometimes the individual withdraws from social and political activities, develops a prestige mentality and ultimately loses his or her vivid individuality. You were right to raise the subject of the criterion of reason...

Some of our writers recently have written novels that study the human conscience. I think that under close examination this concept is not at all vague. Marx has a definition that backs up the belief that modern prose should cover the whole contemporary state of the world. Marx said that *conscience is connected with knowledge and with the whole way of the existence of man.*

If, in creating prose, the author thinks about the whole world, if the concept of conscience arises out of the entire lifestyle of man, prose cannot but attempt to study that sphere.

Aitmatov: But perhaps it would be wrong to define the problem of conscience as a special theme in literature. After all, art is always about conscience, no matter what the subject. Conscience is an inner incentive and an inner inhibition; it dictates what is and isn't allowed, what is beautiful and what is disgusting. If you have a conscience and happen to kill someone you will kill yourself afterwards. If you have no conscience, you will sleep soundly. That principle applies to whatever you do. You may offend someone unintentionally. If you have a conscience, you'll apologize in the morning. These are elementary forms of manifesting one's conscience. Above this are other categories: social and civic conscience.

What is surprising is that we all understand what conscience is and we all believe in it, but shocking things happen that scare people into asking themselves what happened to conscience. Conscience is "ego". My "ego" is conscience. When this "ego" comes into contact with the environment it is guided by conscience. In comparison with the primary standards of the human "I," material relations seem secondary and derivative. Other qualities are also derivative from conscience, for example, the state of being principled or unprincipled, modest or self-satisfied. Literature and the arts from the very outset made questions of conscience the main

subject of their concern. Dostoyevsky's principal pathos, for instance, is compassion shown for the underdog. He always deals with those who are suppressed due to historical and social circumstances, who have to prove their right to be treated like human beings. In order to maintain human dignity in oneself and in others it is necessary to understand that this dignity exists only due to the laws governing communication between people. When I injure the dignity of another person I should not pretend that my own dignity has not been affected.

All this relates to the realm of conscience, and the confirmation of its high standards is the sacred duty of socialist realism.

Last year the *Literaturnaya gazeta* carried a long article by my friend Arkady Vaksberg. It was called "Smerch" (Hurricane) and was about a group of young hikers that set off for the mountains. In ordinary circumstances they were all decent people—engineers, laboratory assistants, etc., good natured individuals who liked each other. When they were high up in the mountains a storm broke out, the temperatures dropped to freezing and it began snowing. There were two close friends among the group.

During the storm one of them was caught on a narrow ledge over a precipice. He was a man of conscience. He asked the others to first make sure they were safe before coming to his aid. But the others, including his close friend, thought only about themselves and forgot about him. In the meantime he froze to death. When the hikers finally managed to get a fire going the stronger ones pushed the weaker ones away from the fire. Conscience suffered defeat.

Our conscience is continually being tested. Only we must realize this clearly. Looking at things from a global perspective, such as relations between peoples and social systems, the results of the "tests" become especially important. Sometimes humankind passes the test with dignity, but often it fails.

Plavius: You sound emotionally involved. But since our time is limited I would like to move on to the next subject.

Becher believed that writers should be able to express themselves in many genres. He felt that when a writer's creativity was limited in range it was also limited in depth. Incidentally, Gorky also said that a professional writer should be able to do anything.

We know that you are a prose writer, literary journal-

ist, essayist, playwright and screenwriter. What about poetry? And what do you think about Gorky's opinion?
Aitmatov: I think that Gorky and Becher were right—ideally it would be wonderful if writers could express themselves in different genres, if, like Siva with his many arms, they could write fiction with one hand, plays and literary non-fiction with another, essays and memoirs with a third, etc. They would be comparable to people who know several languages. As more such people develop, the possibilities increase for understanding the world and for self-expression. Writers, however, should not lower their standards when they work in diverse genres. As for myself, I can't say that I am especially inclined to work in different genres or that I am particularly good at it. When I do something I try to do my best.

I would like to stress once again that writers are at an advantage when they master many genres, including poetry...
Plavius: Have you ever written poetry?
Aitmatov: No, never. You have to be conscientious about everything you do; you have to know your limitations and abilities. I do not write poetry and do not aspire to.
Plavius: I saw your play *Ascent to Mt. Fuji* at the Sovremennik Theater in Moscow. I felt that the performance was not as good as the play.
Aitmatov: I wouldn't say that writing that play was easy for me. The material was originally meant to be a story, but when Galina Volchek[2] and Oleg Tabakov[3] persuaded me that my plot was best suited for the stage, I talked to my friend Kaltai Mukhamejanov, a Kazakh playwright, who later became my coauthor. He wrote the first version in the Kazakh language and I translated it into Russian. We complemented each other, and that's how the play was written.

Later on when the play was being staged and we ran into all sorts of organizational difficulties, I resolved not to get involved in playwriting any more.

However, when I was in the United States I went to the Arena Stage Theater in Washington, D.C., to see the premier of this play. When I saw how people from such a distant country in such a different world responded to the play, how it electrified them and raised so many ideas, I decided that perhaps working for the theater is worth the trouble. However I haven't had time yet to write any other plays.

Plavius: I am familiar to some extent with the "pros" and "cons" raised about the play and its heroes. I purposely used the term "hero" to switch to the next problem. One of the points argued in that discussion was that the play lacked heroism.

But instead of talking about the play itself I would like to discuss the problem of the hero. When you use this word you can't forget its semantics, ignore the concept of heroic, and therefore you almost automatically think of the character as a positive hero.

Aitmatov: The theoreticians will have to sort out the confusion over the terms. I can only express a few of my thoughts.

What the critics mean when they use the term "positive hero" is often too simplistic. I do not want to argue with the critics, but I am bothered by the triteness of the term which takes the life out of what you, the author, have agonized over to create.

If a hero is not an individual, he or she can possess many good qualities, but will not win sympathy; at best, the hero will come out a lovely icon. Heroes in serious literature are contradictory and strong people with a rich inner world. We should proceed from the fact that along with unquestionable or ideal heroes, as it were, there are also heroes that for one or another reason are unable to realize their full potential. Literature must study the individual as the center of life in society in the context of all social and economic conditions.

In this connection I would like to say a few words about the evolution of a hero. In the first years of the revolution, a romantic picture of things was common in literature. As society developed, strict realism took over. We advanced from didactics and the demonstration of ideal personages to the analytical narration and the comprehension of diverse realities.

Plavius: We have on many occasions discussed the question of various stages in the development of socialist art and the problem of progress inseparable from it. We always think of advancement and progress as a positive phenomenon. What do you think about the humane aspect of current scientific and technological progress?

Aitmatov: We know that the scientific and techological revolution involves not only a revolution in science and technology, but in other spheres as well, introducing in life a very strong dose of rationalism. Should we allow ourselves to submit to that? Do we have to relinquish

feelings and emotions and put ourselves at the mercy of rationalism?

In terms of morality, humankind today is not, unfortunately, keeping up with the achievements of its mind and hands. A gap has developed. In our space age, a time when the first person has stepped on the Moon, when unmanned space stations have travelled to distant and unexplored planets, when the power of human beings has grown incredibly, everything is developing extremely rapidly. One would think that crimes and such human qualities as selfishness, malice and spite, should vanish into the past. The fact is that in many countries the crime rate is rising and morality is being eroded. All this is causing a great deal of alarm.

Plavius: This state of affairs is a subject of paramount concern in literature. It leads me to my next question. Is it possible and necessary to demand of literature that it create a model for tomorrow and for a better reality? I'm not talking about utopia. But isn't the question of morality a job for literature, along with the creation of models and the portrayal of desirable situations which should be discussed by all the people? Isn't it literature's job to underline the aspirations and desires that could be put on society's agenda for the future?

Aitmatov: Literature should always deal with general issues and look into the future; it probably cannot do without "models."

However, idyllic pictures of the future painted by some novelists can only entertain a child's imagination. A serious and mature reader is above all interested in people of tomorrow in the context of human relations. This context, I believe, should be the subject of artistic forecasting or, to use the term you suggest, "modelling."

Plavius: What do you think in this respect about the prospects for the cultures of diverse peoples around the world coming closer together?

Aitmatov: The idea of a world culture is generally among the most significant ideas of humankind. It warrants a creative approach. Artistic culture, like the "models" it creates, cannot be and should not be alike everywhere. There should be mutual understanding on the basis of the principles of humanism and belief in a better future for humankind. In various ways we are all striving for this goal. The socialist community is the initial, the fundamental and main sphere of social and spiritual

solidarity, the source of vigorous actions in creating a genuinely progressive universal culture.

Plavius: Now I would like to talk about an issue that is not so global, but certainly not secondary in our literary affairs.

I am talking about the social response to works of art and the struggle of opinions around them. We published the discussion about *The White Ship* which was printed in the *Literaturnaya gazeta*. Our readers regarded it as an example of a professional discussion between people who understand and respect one another. I think that when people try to establish a singular indisputable opinion about a work of art this is contradicting the very essence of art.

Aitmatov: Discussion and the clash of diverse views is the natural condition for the development of art. This does not exclude the possibility that after everything has been said, someone, whether it be an editorial staff or an authoritative critic, can summarize the results.

When a novel happens to be beyond criticism and gains a reputation for being indisputable, even the ultimate example, it gradually becomes a museum display. Such canonization is detrimental to even the most brilliant work.

Plavius: I would like to ask you what you think of criticism in general.

Aitmatov: I used to be nonchalant about criticism. This was probably because of the kind of criticism I was used to, which was largely superficial. Now that I am older and more mature, I feel I have to read serious critiques, those which are a combination of profound analysis and serious conclusions and that deal not only with individual works, but also the various trends. Such works force me to think. Perhaps you know my novel *Face to Face*, about a deserter. In it the protagonist is with a troop train going through his home territory and returns to the station only after his train has departed. When I wrote it I had little experience in writing and in life. Valentin Rasputin's *Live and Remember*, which came out recently, has a similar theme. His novel was written twenty years after mine. Naturally literature has advanced since then and artistic experience is much richer.

If I were writing on the same subject today I would have done it much differently. Since then I have come to understand many things. Literary criticism has cer-

tainly helped; it raises ideas that would have helped me make the story stronger.

Plavius: How did the conditions of your upbringing influence you in creating your personages?

Aitmatov: I already talked about that in the interview you mentioned in which I said that my childhood impressions were part of *The White Ship* ... in the fantasy form they were preserved in my heart when I was still a boy...

My childhood memories were particularly vivid when I was working on *The Cranes Fly Early* (1975). Everything the young heroes experienced was to one or another degree related to my own life and my own experience. This is not true of the concrete situations. They were different. However the source of what is told is my childhood. In general we always carry our childhood with us. It shapes the future individual. Everything that people experience in childhood, all the suffering, all the pain and all the discoveries, remain with them forever and nourish fantasy and recollections... When I was on my way here I saw a young couple on the street who looked very happy. On this clear and beautiful day they were alone together. I was happy for them, but at the same time I felt regret for my own youth when I did not understand the true value of that age, the joy of such intimacy and the oblivious attitude to everyone else around. I thought about this young man and what he would still have to experience in life before he could really appreciate that such moments are fleeting.

Plavius: How do you work? Do you plan your novels well in advance? Do you have to prepare and systematize the factual material? Do you respond to outside impetus or work spontaneously and intuitively, following your inner emotions?

Aitmatov: A writer begins every work anew. Someone once aptly said that every writer is always a beginning writer. A writer may have a vast experience, may have just finished a major novel, but is always a beginner when starting a new one. This is because every new work evolves in its own way. Sometimes it seems to develop spontaneously. One accidental fact and one impression can usher in a chain of images which overshadow everything else. Sometimes a poetic idea originates from reflection, an analysis of reality and the desire to reveal its profound inner content. I cannot say what is better—one or the other.

Plavius: Then let me ask my question in a different way. The process of writing for many authors is regarded as a process of cognition. Do you always know in the beginning what will be at the end?

Aitmatov: No, not always. Of course, in the process of writing you make changes and revisions. But, in principle, an author should have a general idea of why he is writing and what for. I should know where I will end up when starting from a certain point. This does not exclude the possibility of zigzags or deviations from the contemplated path because of the accumulation of new experience.

Plavius: What do you think of the movies that are based on your novels? Do you have any plans to write specifically for film, rather than first writing a novel and then making it into a movie?

Aitmatov: Many of my stories were put into film. My attitude varies, depending on the results: I'm happy when they are successful and upset when they are not. But I am convinced that one must keep trying. It's like in sports. Before a high jumper can break a record he has to try hundreds of times. As the number of tries increases so too does experience, and this brings success, sometimes even more than expected. That is what happened with *The White Ship*. The film directed by Bolot Shamshiev was, in my opinion and the opinion of many others, a major accomplishment of Kirghiz filmmaking. Of course, if we had not tried, had not thought out different versions, but only worried about whether the film would come out right, whether we should try it or not, we probably would not have succeeded.

It is necessary to keep trying, to strive to find a way to translate literature into the language of film. Then literature acquires a second life, a life in film.

Plavius: Since we are talking about the relationship between literature and film, I would like to single out what I think is an important statement you made in the interview for the *Voprosy literatury*: "If modern cinematography is a ship that has a mast, a rudder and rigging, literature is the ship's engine." I think this analogy is absolutely correct.

But you still haven't said whether you are writing anything directly for film.

Aitmatov: I still have no such plans. I can only see myself cooperating with my friends. We are contemplating a far from simple undertaking—a movie about Chenghiz Khan. It must be a serial film. Our idea is to show that no great

military commander or conqueror was able to achieve his goals because he found himself in the grips of the forces of evil which he relied on and which turned him into a toy. This is, of course, a superficial description of the idea. I simply wanted to say that there is such an idea and we're working on it. The story will be written specifically for film.

Plavius: What in your opinion does literature mean for film and film for literature?

Aitmatov: That is an interesting question. I already said many times that literature and film are closely related today. In the future this contact will probably be even greater. One cannot exist without the other. This relates to film which is extremely dependent on literature. After all, the genuine art of moviemaking strives to be art rich in thought. It does not want to simply copy movements; it strives to reveal man's inner life. Major literature is necessary for that. The experience of world moviemaking shows that precisely this is the right path. The best achievements of moviemaking are connected with literature as a source. We can assume that such ties will increase.

Plavius: Our movie industry makes many novels into movies that do not add anything to the primary source, that are simply illustrations. Therefore one often gets the feeling that this is the law of the genre, that movies should only illustrate a story, bring out only the superficial aspects.

Aitmatov: Yes, this happens too often, although directors try to justify it by claiming their orientation is toward wide audiences. But movies, like literature, can have different standards. Of course there should be films that are purely entertaining. But in all spheres of art, and, incidentally, in the theory of art, there should be advanced forces that seriously seek new ways.

Intellectual life was what people in ancient times called anything that was part of an individual's intellectual and spiritual interests, from politics to music. This range of interests today is steadily expanding among individuals and especially among the public at large. Thus, intellectual life is not a privilege of the elite, but is an inseparable part of life among all peoples. This is undoubtedly an outstanding revolutionary gain of the twentieth century. I mean the cult of stereotypes seen everywhere, the standardization of intellectual life prompted largely by the advance of the modern mass media and, above all,

by television. I am not for limiting these media. On the contrary, while taking advantage of all the accomplishments of the scientific and technological revolution it is necessary that high-level creative thinking be part of intellectual life. I am convinced that the main role in this respect must be played by fiction and literary criticism.

The best literature today cultivates the qualities of individuals that fit our social and ethnic ideals, as well as the combined experience of all times, that is, universal ideals. This has always been the eternal purpose of literature. I understand that such an approach to the tasks of contemporary literature may seem at first sight to be somewhat simplistic. Nevertheless, precisely these eternal and universal ideals continue to be the basic subject of literature and the arts. The functions of literature may change, but its fundamental principle—reflection of the essence of human beings—remains the same.

Although the fundamental features of literature are constant, its forms are not. On the contrary, the development of our views of man, society, the universe and our place in it require constant movement, the perfection of forms in a realistic style, because realism among all the modes of the graphic reflection of reality is the summit of our artistic thought. The realism of modern world literature differs from the realistic stories of the past like the geometry of Lobachevsky differs from that of Euclid. As never before literature is playing the main role in intellectual life. For this reason alone we bear a great responsibility.

1977

A Dialogue with Literary Critic Vladimir Korkin

Korkin: Once, when you were talking about what literature is and what it is for, you answered your own question this way: "I believe that the supreme and most pressing task of literature today is to foster a better moral climate in the world. This is as important now as concern for the natural environment, without which there can be no normal, healthy life on earth."

What would you say about that today? What general socio-philosophical and ethical problem does this task present to world literature?

Aitmatov: I would call it a problem of developing a modern mentality... This involves, in the first place, the capacity for progressive and humane thinking, which means, essentially, genuine internationalism and respect for the distinctive qualities of the ethnic cultures, languages and artistic values of peoples around the world. It also involves thinking in terms of time and space and identifying new future dimensions in contemporary life.

It is extremely important that perception of the world today in these terms becomes second nature.

Korkin: A philosopher once said that to think means to strive for universal thinking. What, in your opinion, is today's "universal thinking," without which a contemporary mentality is impossible?

Aitmatov: Humankind's most important concern today must be the concern for peace. It must become an all-embracing and all-absorbing zeal, an idea that rules the hearts and minds of each and every one of us, and it should be regarded as the moral gauge of an individual's personality.

Korkin: What "gauge" is supreme when you learn such astounding facts as the following one described in a popular science magazine? Suddenly some exotic flowers in Paris that had come from Latin America began dying, even though the weather was ideal. Scientists could find no obvious explanation for what was happening. Even-

tually they learned that their native country was having an unusually severe drought and that flowers of the same variety there were also dying.

What an instructive and yet bitter lesson that was!

Perhaps the gauge of an individual is equal to a child's conscience? That is what you said in *The White Ship.*

Aitmatov: Perhaps that is right.

One can only imagine what the history of humankind would have been like, what the world today would be like if we people, who consider ourselves "the crown of creation" were sensitive to one another to the same extent and responded to the suffering or joy of another people or an individual.

Korkin: If only... Is that even possible in society?

Aitmatov: It's probably a utopian dream. However, why did man evolve from the animal if that is not possible? Should we scorn that possibility? I believe in man!

Can humankind give in to self-humiliation and self-destruction after thousands of years of spiritual development, after having become aware only recently—indeed for the first time in history and with such acuteness and pride—of the sublimity of life in its historical movement and of humankind itself as part of life's powerful torrent? That would signify the bankruptcy of the great ideas arrived at by the process of self-examination and at such a high price since the time when human beings evolved...

Pessimism means aimlessness. And that, I am certain, is worse than death.

Korkin: What do you think an aimless person should experience?

Aitmatov: Since biblical times such people have suffered the most terrible anguish. This is how it was expressed in ancient poetry: "In those times people will seek death, but will not find it; they will long for it, but death will escape them."

Korkin: What directs us to the goal that would give real meaning to a person's life, that would rid him of that "biblical" torment?

Aitmatov: Life. This is something worth pondering: if there were no supreme goal, life would have stopped long ago, its tree have withered along with its intellectual branch, humankind. Without hope none of our activities would make sense.

Korkin: But you'll agree that gaining a goal in life only out of fear...

Aitmatov: ...That woul be self-deceptive! It would lead to an even more obscure blind alley of despair or take us back to Neolithic times.

The massive, unprecedented peace movement, involving many countries and peoples, is not a campaign that, having started seemingly spontaneously, is bound to end as the ominous shadow of war disappears. It is an irreversible social awakening and spiritual rebirth of man. Humankind has entered a new age launched by the 1917 Socialist Revolution. I think that humankind has never been as fortunate as it is now that it has for the first time ever become aware of its inherent dignity which is, in my opinion, assured by the intellect that has been lent wings by freedom.

People are the makers of history. This great revolutionary idea, tested in the crucible of hard struggle and inspired in constructive labor, has become an exceptionally potent driving force that has united hitherto separate peoples into a single power. I would say that it is in terms of this unity that we are perceiving a new stage of humankind's evolution toward self-perfection and comprehension of the supreme meaning of life. Its concrete embodiment is socialism and we ourselves are a new historical community called the Soviet people.

This determines our duty and responsibility for the world's destiny, for the future. Before the twentieth century was there ever anything like the world peace movement, the very foundation of which, we are proud to say, was laid by Lenin's Peace Decree?

Korkin: Do you mean that working for peace means, in a sense, working toward a planetary consciousness?

Aitmatov: Yes, because the other extreme is insanity exemplified by plans for nuclear war and all kinds of concepts and doctrines for using weapons of mass destruction. Fighting an insanity hitherto unknown to humankind, which surpasses all our most fantastic notions of evil and the forms it may take, has at the same time caused an unusual upsurge of humaneness, a response whose intensity was unpredictable even to ourselves. And this humaneness manifests itself increasingly in action, in struggle.

It is in the peace movement, more that anywhere else, that modern mentality finds its concrete expression and tests its strength—the modern mentality that enables people to perceive the greatness of the history-making process and the ideas of peace among peoples united by a

sense of fraternity and friendship.

Korkin: New mentality presupposes dismissing old ways of thinking. What is it, in your opinion, that humankind must free itself from?

Aitmatov: From universal degrading fear, from solitude, indifference and cruelty—from all those feelings that are brazenly induced by brainwashing or provoked by Western propaganda serving madness. The liberating process is all the more intense the more clearly people realize how and why they are being used. I think there is nothing more insulting than to offer man the role of marauder. I mean, in particular, the ill-intentioned attempt on the part of Western propaganda to reconcile, and even tempt the peoples of Western countries with the idea of war, by assuring them that they will survive—while other peoples will be wiped off the face of the earth—and will be able to enjoy the fruits of other people's labor.

Korkin: This can only have the opposite effect.

Aitmatov: Absolutely. What bothers me is something else: how could this insane idea have even been conceived?

Man will tend more and more to strive—continuously and irrepressibly—for anything new and for maintaining and continuing life. This is only natural: who would give up nature's most wonderful gift—the joy of seeing and understanding, to use Einstein's words?

Korkin: How would you interpret "seeing" in this context?

Aitmatov: I understand it to mean seeing the world simultaneously with the eyes of a child and of a sage.

Life is an eternal wonder. We, the adults, don't have to be persuaded that this is the truth. We know that for ourselves. But ... do we feel it? The way a child feels it—selflessly and forgetful of himself, without any words being spoken—when the world is reborn in his soul again and again? He finds it as wonderful as on the first day of creation, when the whole world is still sparkling in morning dew.

The nature of human beings, a nature that is ever new, manifests itself involuntarily with primordial force in a spontaneous and irresistible love for all living things.

Nothing can surprise childhood. It is, as paradoxical as it may sound, undoubtedly the most serious time of life. A child loves the whole world, and all human beings. No one is a stranger to him. He is still outside time and yet in all times, and he will not leave childhood until his intellectual development runs the whole course of

human history. Can you imagine what and how he sees?

Korkin: Incidentally, it is no mere chance that this thrilling mystery fascinates writers as well as scientists. Recently I read an article which expressed the anguish of biologists who dream of "seeing" the beginning of human life: "If newborns could remember and speak, they would emerge from the womb carrying tales as wondrous as Homer's. They would describe the fury of conception and the sinuous choreography of nerve cells, billions of them dancing pas de deux to make connections that infuse mere matter with consciousness... It is as if a single dab of white paint turned into the multicolored splendor of the Sistine ceiling."[1]

It is, in my opinion, true poetry, to say nothing of the fact that it is more meaningful than thousands of verses.

Aitmatov: That's only natural.

Korkin: Why do you think so?

Aitmatov: A scientist seeking to fathom the depths of life, to touch a miracle (certainly not with his hands, or it would be destroyed) cannot help but be a true poet. And, most importantly, he sees what has never been seen or experienced before.

Korkin: Doesn't that mean that being a poet today—"to see the unusual in the usual and the usual in the unusual"—is the prerogative of scientists?

Aitmatov: By no means. We see the faces of people radiant with the joy and pride of those who create.

Korkin: It is amazing when what you have created is admired not by one individual but by all the people and by all those who have put their energy and part of themselves into the common cause. What is a person capable of feeling and thinking at such a moment?

Aitmatov: The sense of the people is the sense of history, for history is shaped by the people. The people are conscious makers of history. Hence history is perceived as a person's destiny or a destiny he has carried in his soul.

Korkin: Such a perception of life seems to be typical of the main character—Edigei Buranny—in your novel *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years.*[2] In it you portray the difficult postwar years through flashbacks in the form of Edigei's recollections. Why does that period interest you?

Aitmatov: Because those days were naturally heroic: his character was molded by the spirit of the people who reduced fascism, the most terrible evil on earth,

to ashes. In those days the concepts of "homeland," "the people," "courage," "honor," and "conscience" were particularly valued—they were paid for and drenched in the sacred blood of those who died the deaths of heroes for the sake of life on earth, of those whose mothers are still waiting for them and seeing them at night in their torturous dreams as though they are still alive.

As for Edigei Buranny, he looks at life with the eyes of a man who knows what war is like and he wants to be what he himself dreamed of being should death spare him. Edigei becomes a real man as a result of the incredible human suffering which befell his country and his people and which he shared as he would share any other burden to be shouldered by his country.

God forbid such suffering is necessary to make a real man. And God forbid that people today should disregard the heroic feats performed on their behalf and renounce their sacred duty to remember.

Korkin: Yes, this is the toughest test we, the living, have been presented by History. They say that when God wants to punish someone he takes away the person's reason. This is a disaster. It may be intolerably bitter, but who can condemn or laugh at misfortune? It's worse if one's memory is taken away, and not by God but by people themselves, by turning a person into a stuffed animal capable of killing his own mother. I'm referring, of course, to your legend about the *mankurts*. After all, it isn't just a story, is it?

Aitmatov: What do you think?

Korkin: I don't think so. I also believe some things are even more terrible—voluntary mankurtism. Isn't that the case with Sabitjan, who chose to be a robot rather than a human being? In my opinion the most dangerous thing about the phenomenon that he personifies is his elation in this, and his attempt to convert people who still do not understand the "benefit": "The time will come when people will be radio-controlled like automations. And I mean every single person, from children to adults. Such scientific data already exist. Science has also accomplished this, proceeding from the noblest of interests."

Aside from everything else, Sabitjan lays claim to being a new kind of person, a supermodern individual who is conscious of the "noblest interests."

Aitmatov: But this also makes him a humorous figure.

wanted to show the vulgarity and absurdness of his "philosophy," whose genealogy is generally no secret; it is clear: spiritual philistinism and conspicuous consumerism.

Korkin: And the effect—the atrophy of memory?

Aitmatov: It's even the cause: memory is our merciless conscience. Conscience will never allow a person to involuntarily, and especially voluntarily, betray one's spiritual ideals. Sabitjan must, is forced to, if you will, stop being a human being (a superindividual is not the same thing!) in order to freely abandon himself to money-grubbing, careerism, etc. And his desire to infect others with his "theory," to convert "naive" people to his faith, is a logical development of his thinking—in this way he can deprive them of the moral right to pass judgement on him. People get in the way of a robot. Even their silent disapproval is irritating. That's why Sabitjan is sulky and agitated in front of his father, and especially Edigei; he cannot stand their gaze.

The life of a worthy man who devoted his work and himself to people is the background against which evil, whatever form it might take, is inevitably revealed and exposed.

The history and fortunes of a people are recorded in memory, which prompts man to think about himself and the world around him.

This is a test one does not choose. A weak-willed person will try to resist such a test, but a strong individual will seek it out. No one, however, can avoid it.

Korkin: But you sometimes put your characters to the test by "blind" elements hostile to man—by the steppe, mountains and ocean.

Aitmatov: They are "blind" in so far as we look upon them with fear, failing to understand their nature. Anything that is beyond our comprehension seems to be hostile to us. But why have these elements always, from time immemorial, attracted man so irresistibly? Why did he want to fathom their nature? Was it not because man himself is a thinking element, because he seeks to recall, I think with sadness, the times when he could understand the language of birds and animals, viewing them as "our younger brothers"[3] rather than as his "prey."

I do not urge people to become vegetarians. I am against inhumanity that has become standard practice, justifying the extermination of all living things in the interests of gluttony. I am, to use Mayakovsky's words, being "humane to horses."[4]

If we learn this we will prove that we are modern people. Can an individual be considered modern if his attitude to Mother Nature is marked by barbarism? If he is so unimaginative that he does not see to what wretched life and solitude he dooms future generations who will never know that there were times when birds sang, flowers blossomed and the white deer bewitched man by its regally graceful carriage?

It is true that man is called upon to transform the world. He will do it in a proper way if he always remembers that it is only possible "in coauthorship with water and earth,"[5] as a poet once put it.

I am sure that is how it will be. "The Law on Nature" is the law of our state and has the people's approval. Future generations, having inherited our wonderful homeland, will see us in it and remember with gratitude how we today, looking at the former virgin lands, bow to those who warmed it with the passion of their hearts and revived it with their unceasing and selfless labor.

Korkin: Do you mean to say that man creates his own immortality?

Aitmatov: Absolutely. This is the only "privilege" of man the creator whose work is invariably inspired by his love for people, his desire to help them stand up to the vicissitudes of life and win, be he a musician composing a symphony, a collective farmer growing corn, a construction worker building houses, or a seafarer crossing the ocean.

Korkin: Or a writer?

Aitmatov: If his writing has as strong an impact as the most beautiful poem which consists of only one word—earth—spoken by a far-sighted person at a critical time when it is needed most. Now it is more necessary than ever because humankind is experiencing perhaps its most complex time in history and because, despite this, and even thanks to it (as paradoxical as it may seem!) man has probably never yearned so much as he does now to see the beauty of existence and to lead a full life, because from now on he will be continually plagued by the question—what next?

At any rate, one thing is perfectly clear: by nature man must always yearn for what he has not seen but should see, otherwise he will not be happy.

Korkin: Just like in the Russian fairy tale: go there I don't know where, find something, I don't know what?

Aitmatov: Exactly! So you see that a fairy-tale fantasy

can be quite realistic. The future was programmed in it.

When people ask what it means today to write "in a new way," I believe the answer should be: it means, in particular (we shall deal with the problem in more detail later on), seeking to express a harmonious perception of life by man. That is, to recreate a majestic picture of the world around us as it presents itself to the admiring gaze of our contemporary or is reflected spontaneously in his thoughts, feelings and acts that transform man himself and make him, in the final analysis, turn his eyes on himself also.

Korkin: This idea seems to have something in common with what you wrote in the foreword to your novel *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*. "The fantastic is a metaphor of life allowing life to be seen from a new, unexpected angle. Metaphors have become particularly necessary in our age, not only because of technological advances into the domain of yesterday's science fiction, but rather because the world in which we live is a fantastic one..."

In saying this, did you not try to anticipate the reproach that you were using fantasy to the detriment of a realistic portrayal of life?

Aitmatov: By no means. I have never thought I had to insure myself against any judgment whatsoever, nor do I now. On the contrary. Being a writer and a human being, I need judgment like the air we breathe. If the reader cannot refrain from arguing with me or just saying a few kind words to me it means that I have touched the reader, stirred him. What can be more important? I am sincerely grateful to all such readers for their concern, for their friendly sentiments or severe criticism.

In the foreword I focused presisely on how I see the perception of reality by man (called "the common man") who has discovered the secret beauty of the world in which he has been living for millennia without seeing it.

Is it not the most profound tragedy that can be imagined?

Is it not of direct concern to me also?

I believe this explains why a person is saddest at a time when he would seem to be the happiest, because he is always thinking about everything in the world, about all people living presently as well as long before him. It is a sacred fear of offending, by the reckless expression of rejoicing, those who were or are unable to feel what we do at the time.

I believe that people should always be concerned about the terrible plight of those who lead miserable lives, be it in Chile, South Africa, the US or elsewhere, and in this way, become more human.

The torments of human beings who are tortured and killed because they want to assert themselves as human beings and not be slaves is a ghastly, fantastic dimension of reality. Equally fantastic in its horror is the triumph of the inhuman creatures who do the torturing and killing. The names of these "fantastic" phenomena are many—apartheid, racism, colonialism... There is, however, one common name—imperialism.

Korkin: The portrayal of these shocking phenomena predetermines the ideological-philosophical and ethical content of literature in those countries that have only recently freed themselves from colonial dependence or continue to be oppressed. I feel that the literature of Asia and Africa is (at least in social aspect) grappling with the problem of developing self-identity, something that was tackled by writers of the various ethnic groups in the USSR, including the Kirghiz. Do you agree?

Aitmatov: Not only do I agree, but it couldn't be otherwise. *Ten Days that Shook the World*[6] was by no means just a poetic metaphor.

The experience of the world's first socialist state has shown in practice the advantages of the new social system. The sixty years that have passed since the establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is only a brief span in terms of human history. But it has encompassed a countless number of important events and achievements, the main one being the birth of a new man—Soviet man.

This also explains the influence of Soviet literature on the development of newly-emerging literature. On the other hand, Soviet literature also draws on all the best, everything progressive that there is in other literature.

Korkin: What do you think, in this context, of the idea of "world literature?"

Aitmatov: Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Pushkin, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Balzack, Sholokhov, Faulkner, Garcia Marquez and others belong to the whole of humankind.

For that matter, what unites poets (in terms of the substance of their work and not the genre)—in time and

space—into a single family of humankind's children, into a single, indissoluble poetic force and a single and infinite universe, is the revolutionary nature and the popular spirit of their work. Poetry is a revolution of the soul. Poets are like bridges—they are links between our lives. They are bridges of thought and spirit. Bridges between different generations making the world a single whole with regard to the main lines of moral and philosophical quests and problems "for humanity to live in one community."[7] They are channels for accumulating cultural values and pooling knowledge as inspired by the humanistic ideals inherent in humankind and arrived at through much suffering.

Humankind's modern thinking, including artistic thinking, would be impossible without that terrible longing for the ideal, longing that, as Belinsky[8] put it, is inspired by the noblest idea in the creativity of the greatest writers, becoming a symbol of faith in the inevitability of a perfect man's wonderful life because he is obliged to be happy; he was born to be happy.

Korkin: What then do you consider the main criteria for ethnic literature?

Aitmatov: I share the opinion expressed by Sarwar Murshid, a Bengali literary critic, at one of the conferences of Asian and African writers, when he noted that each ethnic literature has to decide for itself today whether it should be viewed as a component part of world literature or as "great" only within its territorial boundaries.

The temptation to have "its own greatness" inevitably leads to complacency and, later on, to dogmatism.

That is why any literature aspiring to advance should be guided by the strictest principles, both ideological and aesthetic. Only in this way can it overcome its isolation and avoid parochialism. Spiritual parochialism means the estrangement of human beings.

Meanwhile, world literature, as personified by its brilliant creators, has established and continues to perfect the great language of art—the poetry of truth—understandable and dear to all of humankind.

A true artist provides the key for communication. When I meet a person who likes Chekhov, I know that I have found a friend. If a person unknown to me, whatever his nationality, when listening to *Manas*, the epos of my native Kirghiz people, is able to feel its powerful impact and beauty, he is my brother.

Korkin: It is terrible to think that people of different

nationalities not only could be afraid of each other, but also be unable to understand one another.

Just as you, a Kirghiz, are grateful to the revolution for saving your people from enslavement, so too am I, a Russian, prepared for the rest of my days to honor the Socialist Revolution for freeing my people of the shame and guilt for the tsarist autocracy's oppression of other peoples.

Undoubtedly literature of the former colonial countries gains a great deal from the ideological, moral and philosophical experience of this country's ethnic literature, which reflects integrally—through the best works—the "splendid and turbulent"[9] process of the rebirth of man who comes to regard the sentiments of friendship and fraternity as inherent human qualities. What do you think about this?

Aitmatov: Undoubtedly the literature of the different republics in the USSR has made great achievements in the artistic cognition of reality and, as a result, we can be proud of the single multilingual and multiethnic Soviet artistic culture that has emerged and is without precedent in the history of man. This path was no easy ascent. For many nationalities it has involved difficult periods of transition from oral folklore cultures and epic forms patriarchal in nature where the main character had not yet formed as a personality, to a social and psychological characterization of modern man.

I cannot help emphasizing at this point, however, that, while attaching much importance to the ethnic character of art, one should not hold that ethnic distinctiveness is of paramount importance in an artist's work, a sort of an end in itself. The primary concern is the socialist substance of all Soviet ethnic literature in its evolution, involving the well defined principles of the partisan spirit and of the devotion to people in literature and art, common to all.

Korkin: Once you said that a prose writer cannot write in a modern way unless he assimilates the experience of the classical realism of Tolstoy and Chekhov. Could you expand on that?

Aitmatov: The experience of Russian artistic thought is exceptionally significant both in itself, owing to its richness and due to the fact that world culture has been and is being brought within the reach of other ethnic groups through the medium of the "great, powerful"[10] Russian language.

Korkin: What do you feel when you write in Russian?
Aitmatov: I can hardly define the feeling. But it seems to take a special, inimitable form. I should say, from my own experience, that a child can completely master two or perhaps even more languages at a time if they are used more or less equally from an early age.

Russian and Kirghiz have been my native languages since childhood, and will be for the rest of my life.
Korkin: How would you explain the unprecedented interest in the Russian language throughout the world today?
Aitmatov: Mayakovsky explained it: "I'd sit and learn Russian if only because it was spoken by Lenin"[11]. Enthusiasm for Russian is an expression of enthusiasm for the language of the revolution.

Lenin had a profound knowledge of and highly appreciated Russian classical literature as the bearer of great ideals and an impassioned advocate of the liberation of humankind. This explains why it is perpetually modern and has an irresistible influence on us writers who have ventured to fulfil the difficult task of continuing man's eternal tale about man.

I would use as the epigraph to all Russian literature the poignant words of Alexander Radishchev[12] from his *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* written in 1790—words that strike a painful chord: "I looked around me and my soul was weighed down by the human suffering that I saw."
Korkin: Don't you think that these words could be used as the epigraph for all world literature because "around" today means the entire planet?
Aitmatov: Yes, I agree with you.

For centuries man has cast longing eyes at the stars, at infinite cosmic space—wasn't this because man would thus be able to take a detached view of himself?

The image of the earth—the cradle of humankind—as a blue star as seen by the cosmonauts, is extraordinarily human and poetic.
Korkin: It is doubtful whether anyone, even a great poet, had experienced this before. It's a new feeling. Could it, for one, become that "gene" which contains the second nature of human being?
Aitmatov: Exactly. It is obvious now that we used to treat the earth egotistically, with complete unconcern, believing that it was obligated to feed us, quench our thirst, cloth and protect us, without asking anything in

return except that we recognize the fact of its existence.

Now that we have penetrated into outer space, we have suddenly realized, with a feeling of pain and tenderness beyond expression, that it also needs to be protected...

Korkin: From ourselves?

Aitmatov: Unfortunately. But, luckily, it is still not too late.

It is the duty of literature to uphold and propagate this conviction and not allow man to get used to the idea that violence in the world is inevitable and that nothing depends on him, man being just a hostage who will sooner or later be sacrificed to the insanity.

Korkin: I suppose you are talking about the literature of other countries as well, not only of the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries where even a hint of war propaganda and the preaching of hatred or violence are punishable by law and, most importantly, are incompatible with the nature and principles of socialism?

Aitmatov: Of course. I pin my hopes on all progressive world literature. Progressive writers in the West (I have met many of them) are often even more acutely and painfully aware of the deadly danger of the anti-humanism inherent in the bourgeois ideology than we are, and oppose it resolutely. This is a considerable feat on their part, not only as writers but also as human beings. I am proud of, and admire, their great courage and their refusal to be intimidated.

We Soviet writers are not exposed to the pernicious atmosphere of a monstrous industry of pseudoculture which promotes the cult of force and cruelty, romanticizes murder or, on the contrary, lulls man's conscience and the will to live with sickeningly sweet illusions. This is the way the industry, according to its "humane" authors, prepares people for a painless and even desirable withdrawal into nonexistence where one will supposedly be relieved of human suffering and at the same time will enjoy eternal bliss... But we should not stop thinking about this. Of course, when I write a book I cannot be sure that it will reach the foreign reader, will help him understand that he is being lied to in order to awaken his primitive instincts. If it does, however, I want it to influence him in exactly this way—appeal to his honor, conscience and dignity, and strengthen his faith in himself as a human being.

Korkin: Do you mean that every writer should certainly

think about the world reader too?
Aitmatov: Above all, about man.
Korkin: This idea was examined by Lev Tolstoy who asserted that the most important task and purpose of literature was to make man love life in all its manifestations. Are you not disturbed by the word "make"?
Aitmatov: Why should I be? I am sure that was not a slip of the tongue by Tolstoy, because "to make" means, to use Tolstoy's own expression, to persuade by the force of art, stir the imagination and ennoble the soul.

The great artistic world that was created by his genius is enormous. It is difficult to imagine the monstrous force that he battled, a force only visible to him and that threatened to degrade and destroy all that was human in man. Would he have ventured to enter into this battle that seemed to be doomed if he had been guided by anything other than a great love for truth and for man? No, of course not. Then there would never have been Tolstoy, which is a horrible thought—our souls would have such a yawning abyss. That man, the best of the best, suffered so much to give us the gift of faith in the triumph of good over evil.
Korkin: But "good" and "evil" are socially concrete concepts. They exist only in the context of time. As you have pointed out, the people of past centuries could not have conceived of today's evil. With what means can an artist portray nature and the essence of "evil," in order to stir the imagination of people in the twentieth century? You are right, genuine reality is fantastic. It is actually even more terrifying than any fantasy because it is real.
Aitmatov: True, today it is not so easy to shock man by the force of art—the pain threshold of humankind which experienced the horrors of the war against fascism and the tragedy of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and which is aware of the brutalities being committed in many places throughout the world every day, has risen considerably.

Take, for example, *Apocalypse*. Not so long ago it stirred the imagination of man, showed him the "end of the world," as it was pictured by the ancient poet and prophet:

"And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horse prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men.

"And their hair as the hair of women, and their teeth

were as the teeth of lions.

"And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle.

"And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails."

The aim of art is certainly not to "frighten" the readers, but to help them overcome despair and fear of life, and promote noble feelings which enable them to oppose evil whatever forms it takes. In this context, it seems to me that we can look upon tragedy as a genre capable of expressing modern man's perception of life most fully.

Korkin: Do you believe there will ever be another Shakespeare?

Aitmatov: I once asked Dmitry Shostakovich the same question. I was surprised and impressed by his idea that today new Shakespeares stand a better chance than ever of appearing as humankind has reached an unparalleled level of intellectual universality and, therefore, when such a great writer shows up, he will be able to express, as is the case with music, the whole world through himself. This conversation took place in passing and it was only later, when I stopped to think about it, that I grasped the meaning of Shostakovich's words: he expected from literature an all-embracing expression of life such as we obtain through music.

The whole world in himself.

Even if it is an impossible challenge, can a writer have a more magnificent dream than this?

As Tolstoy said, the great and noble mission of literature is to make man love life and the world. This is the duty of every honest writer who realizes that it is the time to speak out, to say what is vitally necessary. That is what it means to be a realist.

1982

A JOY TO LIVE ON EARTH

Conversation with Nikolai Khokhlov

It was as though nature had intended to return to the land all the snow, and even more, that had not fallen in previous years: the snowfall was unusually heavy, a triple layer. And in March! The thick white snowdrift, like the bushy brows of an old man, lay on the tops of mountains and on the roofs of rural houses. Villages like The White Ship, *were icebound.'* Mother Earth *was like white lamb's wool. Both people and animals came* Face to Face *with this unbelievable blizzard.* The Skewbald Dog Running on the Edge of the Sea[1] *crawled under a car covered with snow. The cream-colored pacer, Gyulsary, was tied up in the yard. Every morning and during every recess* The First Teacher—*Duisheh*[2] *and his pupils shoveled snow, clearing the path that leads to the school.* My Poplar in a Red Kerchief *together with Jamila were locked up, looking through the snow-covered window at the snow-covered street, feeling as though* The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years.

The person I was so anxious to see was caught in the storm and delayed, but when we finally met my anxiety turned to a kind of facetiousness:

You were the one who invented the Buranny Station.

He smiled. Then he talked about what he had seen: wild goats were descending from the hills to a human abode. Excited wolves and foxes were running around in open view. Unfortunately the partridges and other birds were dying: they could not find food through all that snow. After all, it is an area where pomegranates and grapes grow! He recalled the conversations and meetings he had with those who had elected him to the USSR Supreme Soviet for the fifth time.

I would have preferred to lead into my conversation with Chinghiz Aitmatov with an excerpt from his new book; that was my original idea. The newspaper would have gladly printed it. Incidentally, what is the new book about?

Aitmatov: I cannot present an excerpt nor answer your question. I must apologize, but I never do that. It is not easy for me to describe what my novels or stories are about. Does that sound strange? I just cannot run ahead of the reader who must be allowed to draw his own conclusions. Don't be hard on me, but I can only repeat what I have once said: singling out an idea or the subject of a book is the same as trying to separate the water and the flour from bread.

I simply cannot find separate pieces from my books that are complete passages and can be removed from the total canvas. Everything flows together, so I hate to divide it into pieces.

Khokhlov: I would like to talk about your creative method, about your principles as a writer.

Aitmatov: Okay, let's talk about them. Like any other person I have "my own" space and "my own" time. In addition, I have "my own" territory—my electoral district. As a representative in the Supreme Soviet I meet with people, am stimulated by their interests and find out about their concerns and problems. You don't just become "familiar" with local affairs, but also gain insight into the various social problems and become involved as much as possible in the people's lives. We can certainly boast many changes. Take the village of Bazar-Kurgan, where I have just been. Not so long ago it was a tiny village. Now that district center is perhaps one of the best in those parts; last year it commissioned a Palace of Culture which is as fine as any urban theater. Constituents in the nearby district, from the village of Lenin-Jol, have already asked me to help them get a large irrigation canal built from Naryn to the Mailisai water system and start cultivating virgin land.

So far there is nothing special about what is happening, but eventually the various developments around the canal construction project could become material for another book. Who knows. The plot is a piece of life, live stories and destinies. Everyone has his own way of selecting the plot. One writer looks for something entertaining and another for a true-life situation that readers can recognize. The main thing is that the story contain ideas that tackle the complex problems of contemporary life. Yet I must admit that at the moment I could not write a novel, for instance, about the Baikal-Amur Railway construction project or any other major project. I believe that contemporary society cannot be under-

stood in instantaneous terms; before the construction project is over a novel is ready.

I am not saying this to criticize anyone else: literature never has been and should not be homogeneous. "My" time is mainly the postwar years, the fifties and sixties, and part of the seventies. This period made me what I am and I experienced it to the utmost. The war began when I was twelve years old. I worked in the fields, was the secretary of the village Soviet and the accountant clerk for a tractor team.

What does all that mean? We teenagers, because of the circumstances, had to deal with the problems of our people and had to understand them. They were really all we thought about. At the front the dream of the soldiers was to withstand the enemy assault and ultimately win, but in the rear we worked for the front and took for ourselves only what was left over. I don't think there ever was a time when the people had such deep understanding of the need to sacrifice for the common good. It was a time when people exerted the greatest emotional and physical energy. Working in the village Soviet, I knew every family very well. Life tested us in every possible way. This long and hard road was also mine. I try not to talk about this so much, but how can I help it if it is part of my experience and my convictions.

Khokhlov: Did the people you remember come alive again, as it were, in your artistic creations?

Aitmatov: Most of my characters are imaginary, rather than directly taken from life. What's most important to me is to convey the atmosphere of those years and the thinking that was typical for those times, even if it appears to be naive today.

Khokhlov: Pushkin valued the truth of intellect in a writer, and Turgenev talked about mathematical exactingness in portraying reality.

Aitmatov: I understand this as accurate reflection of existing phenomena, people and their relationships. Among the people this approach is called justice. You seek the truth stubbornly, although it would seem that it lies on the surface and accessible to understanding. And not every truth suits a writer in the sense that far from everything in life can become a subject for art. We must admit that truth in everyday life differs from truth in works of art: in art truth should become a high-resistant alloy free of everyday scale, long-lasting and impressive, strong to the point of being irrefutable.

A consolidation or concentration of good and evil takes place. Precise conclusions and true feelings are absolutely necessary.

Khokhlov: But when you are at your desk, do you conjure up the images of live people, people you know?

Aitmatov: Yes, they are nearby. Look at a portrait painted by an artist and you will see that it does not identically resemble the person who posed for it. I repeat that I always invent my characters. Moreover, since we're talking about my method as a writer, I always have a clear picture of the finale of my idea. When I begin writing I know just how my story will end. The beginning and middle are somewhat hazy, but I have the end so thoroughly worked out that I can sit down and write the last chapter. The end serves as a tuning fork that helps me tune the whole story accordingly. If I can see the finale, I am certain the story will come out right.

Khokhlov: That's interesting.

Aitmatov: I find something else interesting...

Khokhlov: What's that?

Aitmatov: My invented characters were intended to live in novels, not in the real world. But something else happens. After the publication of a story or a novel, as a rule, I frankly am more interested in responses and letters from readers than in critical reviews. The letters usually go something like this: I know the person you portrayed very well; he works in this or that place... I want to tell you that your Jamila is doing well; she has three children and is well cared for... I'm the same old man Momun you wrote about in *The White Ship*. I'm still alive and well. My boy has grown up. But he got into some trouble and was unfairly convicted. Please help us... I am the first teacher, a Russian, although in your book he is Kirghiz...

This gives you a good idea of the magical quality of an artistic invention. You are justified in correcting me by saying that it depends on the invention. I agree, but it is not my place to comment.

Khokhlov: The work is finished, the story is printed, the critics have spoken and the letters from readers have been read. You, as the author, can't help but return to your offspring. Do you have any doubts or regrets? Do you feel there is something you haven't said, something you have held back on? I hope my question does not offend you.

Aitmatov: Not in the least. Yes, this happens. I'll give you a concrete example. At first I had a different fate in mind for the teacher in *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*. He was not going to die of a heart attack, as he ultimately did in the novel, but under other circumstances. The prisoners were being taken past the station where the teacher's family still lived: his wife and small children. You can just imagine how the poor man felt? At night he was taken through the Boranny-Buranny station. He ran away in Saratov when he was being transferred to another train, realizing what could happen even by attempting to escape. What transpired was irreversible.

As a writer I could feel how many dramatic and psychologically believable pages could have been written. But after thinking it over very carefully for a long time, the writer-man rejected what the writer-artist would have done. The "milder" version was used in the novel. You may say that I took the easy way out, but I maintain that I took pity of my characters. I did not want his wife and children to go through such agonizing scenes: they had suffered enough. My emotions as a writer had to be suppressed.

Khokhlov: But one can't help but think that to some degree you were working against yourself ...

Aitmatov: That's not exactly true: I was not going against myself entirely. I admit that the compromise was not easy. But I managed to preserve the core of the whole incident. However, speaking very frankly, there is some basis to your doubts. What in particular? My examples are two stories by two writers—my own *Face to Face* and Rasputin's *Live and Remember*. Both of them are essentially on the same subject. Rasputin's story is superb, far better than mine which appeared much earlier. But if only you knew what terrible thunder and lightning came down on me, a young and beginner writer! Even my close colleagues threw up their hands: "We have defeated such a strong enemy to the astonishment of the whole world, and you, instead of praising heroes, chose to write about some scum ..." They were also irritated by the fact that the deserter in my story, after stealing a sack of seeds in the field, could come to realize on his own what it meant to hoard seeds in times of hunger when they lacked seeds to plant. Then the deserter, a filthy individual, headed back toward the field, dragging the sack, and threw it into a cart.

Later I deleted this incident. Why? At that time the

attitude was that if a person was no good then he had to be painted as black as possible, but if he was "admirable" he had to be pure and clean, soaring above us all. True conclusions do not come all at once for everyone. It takes time for everything to come right and to fall into place.

Incidentally, Rasputin's novel, written twenty years after mine, reached the reader, as far as I know, without the troubles that had to be overcome with *Face to Face*. The reader, no offense intended, is a rather fickle personality. I am talking about this as an inevitable and natural process and in cheerful terms. But so as not to be one-sided and totally adoring of the wonderful, kind reader, I must admit, and not without bitterness, that some of the letters I receive are nihilistic and depressing. We have to speak openly about this, ring the alarm, polemicize and defend optimism, especially among the young.

Khokhlov: Propagate kindness?

Aitmatov: This is what literature has been doing from time immemorial. Nevertheless, there is some element of abstractness here, like unaimed gunfire. Reading novels, stories, newspaper and magazine articles, you can see the word used everywhere in so many different ways. But the concept of kindness in the course of social development has changed. In the past, people were considered kind if they gave food and cast-off clothes to the poor, donated to the church, mosque or monastery and fed the hungry on certain days. The concept of kindness is a spiritual one, yet in that context it had a purely material basis ...

I believe that kindness, as a human quality, is better suited for the home and family. I find it hard to imagine what kind of conduct in a factory director a worker would view as being kind. Not caring when a worker has no excuse for being absent? Not withholding a bonus even though the worker has not been reaching a planned target for a long time? If such conduct is nonetheless regarded as kindness this kindness is at the expense of the state.

I am certain that workers are not interested in abstract kindness, but in a decent attitude toward them, in tactful relations and concern for their needs. What could be more important to them than the social justice which is the foundation of our lifestyle? Let us vigorously fight boorishness and disrespect for elders. After all, in the East, there was a good reason why honoring the elderly was fundamental to individual and social re-

lations, why these relations were cultivated for centuries, and were part of the ethical norms and traditions.

In short, every person should be well bred, cultured, respectful of others, free and creative.

When I met my constituents this time I talked to the elders. They complained that the young are now disrespectful, rude and arrogant; hence there is a problem with alcohol abuse, rowdyness and crime. One elder was especially troubled. He said his grandson had been a fine boy until the age of fifteen, when he changed completely—he no longer honored the elderly, cared about traditions and was critical of so many things. I explained that the boy had probably become mixed up with the wrong crowd. Then he asked me where this crowd came from, who was responsible for that development? I had a hard time answering that one ... I still can't get over being upset about it.

Khokhlov: It is a good feeling to experience an acute sense of responsibility for everyone and everything.

Aitmatov: When I am at my desk I feel a deep urge to identify with the troubles of my contemporaries and to understand them. I care very much about them. I also try to fathom the enormous responsibility our country bears. There should never be another war, when life becomes disposable to be used for one assault, for the sake of one grenade thrown at a tank ...

Every person must have a chance to live a long time on this Earth, to enjoy the gift of the true joy of existence which is presented once to Caesar and shepherd alike. No one has the right to deprive man of the fruit of creation—to live and multiply on Earth, the soul and intellect ever noble.

1984

THE PRICE IS LIFE

Conversation with Irina Rishina of *Literaturnaya gazeta* after the Eighth Congress of Writers of the USSR Held on June 1986.

Aitmatov: I think I am expressing a popular sentiment when I say that this congress was very different from previous ones. There are, of course, specific reasons. This is a time when our society is making enormous efforts to bring about decisive changes in all areas of life, one of the main ones being the people's mentality and psychology. Without this there can be no true renewal, because all other factors rest on the original and ultimate factor—the human factor. Our big meeting of writers was also in the spirit of the times. An array of important problems, fundamental and conceptual issues of everyday life and literature, were raised in serious, poignant, frank and passionate speeches—issues such as social justice, ecology, and developing ethnic cultures today. Naturally, speakers also raised organizational matters and professional questions that are on the minds of writers today.

Rishina: You did not speak at the congress, but if you had, what would you have said?

Aitmatov: Unfortunately, I just didn't have time to prepare a speech. But if I had addressed the congress I would have talked mainly about ethnic problems, the interaction of cultures, literature and languages. These are vitally important issues since our country is a federal and multiethnic nation and whatever happens in one republic is important to all of them. We probably do not think of this always. But that is how things stand. The development of ethnic literature in the republics, the extent to which such literature meets modern and timely needs on its home ground as well as within the general context of the socialist lifestyle common to all of us is largely responsible for the civic, moral and spiritual potential of man. I'm talking about what man contributes to society and the world—harmonious relations or poor compatibility, nation's high morale and respect for the values of another nation or arrogance and indifference toward others who speak different lan-

guages. These are not academic questions, but extremely important and urgent ones because they affect our everyday life. We must also have openness in this matter as a sign of the new way of thinking.

The times require that we cultivate openness. I already spoke at the Party Congress in Kirghizia and would like to repeat what I said then: we must abandon old gauges and comparisons, discard these shackles forever. When we analyze ethnic cultures today we constantly remind ourselves that the people used to be semi-literate, with no alphabet. It is as though we are still living in the days of the campaign to abolish illiteracy. But those days are gone forever and can no longer serve as a reference point. We must never compare our industry today with the industry of 1913. It is ridiculous—we are living in the new age of scientific and technological revolution. We should use another gauge to evaluate the development of ethnic literature and ethnic culture: we can no longer rejoice because everyone can read and write, because we have newspapers, radio, televisions, theaters, etc. Yes, we have these things and that's great. But we should not use these facts to evade new problems that arise when a people and its culture is active. If I had spoken at the congress I would have told my fellow writers, especially the journalists and critics: do not make it sound like there are no nationalities problems; do not cite these elementary things as examples. This is not what we should be thinking about today, but about how profoundly and how democratically an ethnic culture and ethnic identity is developing in the system of our internationalist structure. Internationalism is not arithmetic, is not simple addition, but the algebra of many ethnic cultures that are independent. At the same time this given fact is inconceivable without a specific common denominator for all of our spiritual culture and without the vigorous use of the accomplishments of more highly developed cultures. This is what we should be talking about and grappling with.

For instance, the development of an ethnic literary language. What kind of processes are taking place in this language? What about borrowed words—are they entering the language naturally, organically and timely, or are they the result of conservative thinking and lazy thinking when something is taken from one language and introduced into another mechanically and even for the sake of flattery.

I would like to set the record straight: it's common knowledge that Russian is a great language and to talk today about its role in all ethnic cultures in this country would be like forcing an open door. Russian is a great language, but that does not mean we shouldn't pay attention to the inner workings of another ethnic language and should introduce Russian words into that language if they are not necessary. An interesting fact in this respect is the names of two regional newspapers printed in Kirghiz—one of them is called *Issyk-Kul pravdasy* and another is *Naryn pravdasy*. This offends me deeply. What kind of a people is it that has been in existence for thousands of years but does not have the word "truth," "justice?" Why should we distort Russian in such a way and degrade Kirghiz which has around ten synonyms for the concept of "truth?!" The development of an ethnic literature, no matter how many talented writers worked on it, depends on a whole number of other factors, on the general culture of the people and their education. In Frunze the number of Kirghiz-language schools is not growing, yet hundreds of new schools are being built. Long ago we should have opened up Kirghiz childcare centers in the capital. No one is standing in our way, yet no one is organizing such centers. In contemporary conditions this is vitally important to the people. What kind of ethnic culture is it that does not have its own foundation?

But when such painful thoughts are aired there are always some people who charge that these ideas are manifestations of nationalism and narrow-mindedness. Unfortunately, this excessive vigilance, which is largely prompted by careerism, is not being criticized strongly enough. The result of this trend is that a special kind of demagogue has appeared in the republics who has practically made a prestigious profession out of praising the Russian language and depreciating his own, whether necessary or unnecessary.

The depreciation of one's own language and ethnic originality is one extreme. But there is another, quite the opposite, which also arouses indignation—the tendency of only seeing one's own people among specially honored individuals, seeing only the good points while not noticing the negative aspects. It is an understandable desire, but one that is anti-dialectical and to some extent an obstacle to renewal.

When we theoretically surmise that some day in the

distant future all languages will merge together and there will only be one or two languages in the world we do not stop to think that it is the world that loses. These "victorious" languages will not have a nourishing environment. Monotony cannot ensure development. Therefore it is important to preserve as long as possible the diversity of languages. In the age of the information boom, when conditions have developed that can level everything, language dependence will not help anyone. I believe there should be numerous literary languages and they should have substantial possibilities to exist and develop.

The immortality of a people is in its language. Every language is great for its own people. Each of us has a duty to his or her language: to preserve its purity and multiply its wealth.

But now we are coming up against a new dialectic of history. Contacts between different countries are constantly growing and this is becoming a vital and cultural necessity. In these conditions every person must know several languages. Bilingualism is developing in the literature of several republics. Incidentally, I am a bilingual writer. Vasil Bykov, Ion Drutse, Makud and Rustam Ibragimbekov, and Timur Pulatov write both in their native languages and in Russian. I know many people who are good at several languages spoken both in the USSR and other countries. This gives them access to a huge world of literature and culture. I am certain that this is the path of the future—the world should open up to everyone. Recently I met a group of young trilingual Algerians—they had a good command of Russian, naturally they knew their native Arabic language well and had excellent knowledge of French. One young teacher also knew the Berber language. I feel they are models of the future.

Rishina: I would like to talk about your own writing and your new novel *The Executioner's Block* the publication of which was started in the June and August issues of the monthly *Novy mir* (New World).

As Albert Schweitzer once said, just thinking about the meaning of life is in itself valuable. The heroes of your novels, in terms of their moral and philosophical qualities, try to understand the complicated truth of life and its meaning. Of course each of them does this at their own level, whether they are the wise old peasant Tolgonai in *Mother Earth* or Tanabai in *Farewell, Gyul-*

sary! who is referred to as a peasant philosopher. What you once wrote about Edigei, about his attempts to understand the world and himself, I think is to some extent carried over into your new novel. This indicates that even then you were developing this idea: "My hero Edigei Buranny thinks a lot about the meaning of human existence... There are some people who link this question with belief in God, but many of them see God as no more than a form of morality, conscience and self-identity, at least one of the forms. My hero is a Soviet working man, not a member of a sect; he thinks about this question and the answer is not as simple as in the words of a travelling lecturer."

Aitmatov: It's true, these ideas came up in my previous novel *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*. Edigei began thinking about these things when he was involved in the upsetting process of burying his friend Kazangap. After a long and painstaking search for a burial place, just before the funeral rites Edigei appealed to God: "I want to believe that you exist and that you are in my thoughts. And when I pray to you I am actually talking through you to myself."

As you can see, although Edigei is praying to the Almighty, he is essentially talking to himself, because no one but he and others like him can ease his mind. Edigei is what you could call a spontaneous thinker, a common man with no training as a philosopher, whereas the hero of my new novel *The Executioner's Block*, Avdii Kallistratov, predisposes himself to religious activities. But they are similar to each other in some ways—apparently in their approach to life, yearning for justice and kindness. So in this respect, Edigei and Avdii, who are very different people, have something in common.

Rishina: The first and second parts of the novel have a few story lines: that of Avdii Kallistratov, Moyunkumy "junta," the drug addicts and the wolf family. However it is clear that the main one for you is that of Avdii Kallistratov. I think that this character is a surprise for even those readers who know that each new novel by Aitmatov never repeats a previous one, is distinguished by thematic and artistic innovation. In *The Executioner's Block* it is the first time you have made the main character a Russian.

Aitmatov: Yes, Avdii is Russian, but I see him as more than that, as a Christian, although I assume that what is

happening deep inside of him also applies to my contemporaries whose origins are linked with a different religion. In this case I tried to find the way to man through religion, not to God, but to man! Undoubtedly the most important story line for me is that of Avdii and his quest.

Rishina: But I don't think it's any accident that you have chosen a Christian to play the main role and not a Muslim, for example.

Aitmatov: Yes, you're right. The Christian religion has a very strong source of inspiration, the figure of Jesus Christ. Islam, which was the religion of my ancestors, does not have such a figure. Muhammad was not a martyr. His life had its extremely difficult periods, but he never was crucified for his ideas, nor did he grant humankind eternal forgiveness. Jesus Christ enables me to tell modern man something ever so intimate. That's why I, an atheist, crossed roads with him in my creative endeavors. This also explains why Avdii Kallistratov is my main hero and why he is the way he is.

Rishina: Reading *The Executioner's Block* you can't help but think of Dostoyevsky and his Prince Myshkin and Alyosha Karamazov...[1] And your Pontius Pilate and Jesus of Nazareth remind one of Bulgakov.[2]

Aitmatov: Well, what can I say? It's nice to hear that, but not at all because I want to be compared with my great predecessors. It's just that I dealt with the same problems they once did. These are eternal categories, eternal problems that not only I, but many others after us will return to. Of course, I thought of Bulgakov in that his Pontius Pilate and Joshua, and my Pontius Pilate and Jesus of Nazareth are one and the same person and are in the very same situation. But I hope that the attentive reader will see that I tried to resolve this situation not so much in a fundamentally different way, but wanted to add a significant element to the dialogue between Pontius Pilate and Christ—a certain period of time has passed since Bulgakov depicted this meeting and we are living in a somewhat different time frame. I wanted to incorporate something new, something we understand today and, in particular, talk about the global vulnerability of the human world as such. I do not at all insist that we regard Doomsday literally as the nuclear end of the world. But awareness of the reality of this menace compelled me to try and prove that we must not fear an imaginary or mystical end of the world, but what

we are capable of doing ourselves, what can become a terrible reality.

Rishina: After the publication of the last part of your novel, the critics will assess it, including in *Literaturnaya gazeta*. But what can you say today to those readers of *The Executioner's Block* who accuse the author of being almost conciliatory to religion?

Aitmatov : I expect the novel to evoke different responses and interpretations. After the novel is published in full I expect a serious literary or, if you will, philosophical discussion. People who judge writers and their novels by whether they approve of religion or not, finding only familiar formulas without noticing what the goals are—anything but religious—are reading but not seeing anything.

Rishina: Judging by your novels, music and songs are important to you. You wanted to name one of your first novels *Melodia*, meaning the music of love, didn't you? That was the novel that Alexander Tvardovsky called *Jamila* when he printed it in *Novy mir*. And didn't you name your first book published in Kirghiz *Ovon* (Melody)?

In *The Executioner's Block* there is an episode which is important in the philosophical structure of the novel—when Avdii Kallistratov listens to early Bulgarian religious hymns in the Pushkin Museum. Listening to them he understood the meaning of a Georgian story he once read, the ballad called *The Six and the Seventh*.

Legends, parables, fairy tales and songs play a substantial role in your stories. You made up that ballad, didn't you? Or is it based on an old Georgian legend? What meaning does it have? When I read the ballad and came to the part when the seventh died I felt you were trying to show how the ethics of an individual and society did not coincide. The seventh kills six people without hesitating, because if the enemy does not surrender he is destroyed—in the name of the common good and in the name of an idea. But as a human being he cannot endure what he has done; to him murder is immoral. And, of course, it is significant when Avdii contemplates the reasons why the seventh had to kill himself and in fact does that while he is listening to religious hymns. One of the main Christian commandments, as we know, is "thou shalt not kill."

Aitmatov: That's one way of interpreting it. It was a chain reaction: the six put up fierce resistance killing

others. The seventh punished them in revenge, but he punished them in the same brutal way and thus he destroyed himself—and so it was a vicious circle, a tragedy. There is no such ballad, of course, and I am anxious to see how my Georgian readers will respond to it, how well they feel I have portrayed their realities, although that is not what's most important. Through this story I wanted to say that civil war is always linked with national tragedy, that torment, bloodshed and national tragedy are inevitable. This can be reflected in music and songs that not only glorify the struggle, the victory and the joy of victory, but also, on the contrary, compel us to regret and mourn the victims.

Rishina: The novel is called *The Executioner's Block.* But I heard that the original title was *Rapid Succession.* When reading the book I came across some phrases that reminded me of the other title: "I will have to plunge into a whole new life, a life that from time immemorial has swished around in the whirlpools of hustle and bustle, and *rotations*" and "...through all the *rapid successions* of time a thread has reached his destiny."

Why did you change the title? After all, the title always means a lot to you.

Aitmatov: It's true that I intended to write a novel called *Rapid Succession*, and I still want to. It was supposed to be about Avdii Kallistratov, about the family of wolves and many other things. It turned out to be very complicated to combine different story lines and different time periods in a unified whole. When I realized how long it would take me to finish I decided to write Avdii's story separately. I did not think it would be a full-length novel, but simply a story. However it developed into something more.

I believe that the title *The Executioner's Block* fits the content of the novel. Executioner's block is not only a platform for executions. Throughout our lives we face an executioner's block in one way or another. Sometimes we actually get up on the block, although we remain physically alive, and sometimes we don't. In this case the title indicates the price paid for the executioner's block, for getting up on it and whether there is any sense in it, in this road to Calvary.

Rishina: The novel gets off to a tragic start with a heart-rending description of a terrible slaughter in a unique saiga savannah and the history of a wolf family. Your readers are accustomed to your use of nature and the

animal world in your stories—the pacer Gyulsary, the camel Karanar, and now the wolves Akbara and Tashchainar which you write about with amazing psychological and emotional strength...

Aitmatov: The animal world is a large part of Kirghiz folklore, because it is the folklore of livestock breeders. The hero is always portrayed together with his horse. Huge psychological sections are connected with the horse in the great *Manas*—the story of horse competitions and what happens to the human soul in those instances, the kinds of passions that rage in it and the dreadful clashes that occur between people. We have an amazing and ancient epos called Kodzhodzhash which goes back to the times when man, nature and the animal world were still not divided. I used one of its motifs in *Farewell, Gyulsary!* The epos is about how a young and bold hunter Kodzhodzhash—his tribe's breadwinner—kills all the wild goats in the mountains. One day the crippled Gray Goat begs him not to kill her and the old Gray Billy-Goat, because they are the only ones who can carry on the species. The Gray Goat said the wrong thing when she told Kodzhodzhash that if he did not leave them alone he would bring down upon himself terrible punishment. The hunter laughed at this—what on earth could she do to him?—and killed the old Billy-Goat. Although the Gray Goat was crippled she managed to run away, and when the hunter was chasing her he ended up in such inaccessible mountains that there was no way for him to get either down or up. "This is your punishment," said the Gray Goat as she walked away.

That was how the ancients depicted an ecological dead end. Of course, this epos has many interpretations. Mine is this: as early as ancient times man warned himself against abusing nature and, in particular, annihilating animals even for his vital needs. Even then people were aware of these aspects of ecology problems which are contemporary concerns.

Thus, the sources of my fervent attitude toward the animal world are rooted in Kirghiz folklore.

Rishina: In your previous stories Tanabai and his horse Gyulsary, Edigei and his camel Karanar were close to one another, their destinies intertwined. But in *The Executioner's Block* the wolves rise above man, above his lowly habits. During a hunt for saigaks in the Moyunkumy Savannah "...in this apocalyptic silence the female wolf Akbara saw the image of a human face. It came so

close, was so clear and frightening that she gasped..."
Aitmatov: Beast sees beast.
Rishina: In fact Akbara, this beast of prey, is frightened by the human beast. In your novel the family of wolves seem to be between two human worlds. On the one hand, we see the planet of people as represented by Avdii with his humane attitude to all living things, philanthropy, his desire to understand the reasons for moral degradation and help them not only by preaching but also by becoming involved in their affairs, and his hunger for love—"I could have never imagined that to think about my beloved and to write her letters would become the meaning of my life ... I will never stop loving her as long as I live..." And on the other hand, the planet of inhumane people—the "junta", the name that was used by the team of killers in the Moyunkumy Savannah, alcoholics, the homeless, the rolling-stones living by the laws of the beasts, in the worst sense of the word, and the young marijuana dealers. The "junta" essentially had no human element in it, but the wolves were a family, they had attachment to each other and parental feelings. I see this contrast from the very beginning. It is underlined by the scene in the Pushkin Museum when Avdii listens to the singers from Sofia just before his trip to the steppe with the marijuana dealers. "What a contrast between the divine hymns and addicts' base craving for the evil smoke of the evil grass." I do not know whether the architectonic of part one and part two of the novel was deliberate; at any rate, I saw the contrast rather clearly.
Aitmatov: It continues to the end of the novel. In part three of the novel the family of wolves and its tragic story are also between two worlds that are linked by the stories of two families, two opposite kinds of people—the shepherds Boston Urkunchiev and his enemy Bazarbai Noigutov. They are antipodes, like Avdii Kallistratov and Grishan, the head of marijuana addicts who converts the young to his beliefs: "Everything in this world is bought and sold", "Money is everything."
Rishina: Why are you so concerned about youth problems?
Aitmatov: In my opinion they have become acute. I remember when I was a college student. We had just come out of the war, were just getting on our feet; so life had many difficult moments, but our young souls that were sometimes naive and infantile were filled with the

spirit of collectivism and internationalist solidarity. Perhaps it was because during the war we had all suffered together.

Rishina: This comes out clearly in your *The Cranes Fly Early*.

Aitmatov: I would not like to be a young person today.

Rishina: Do you mean young in age?

Aitmatov: Yes I do. Although it's not possible, I still would not like to be young again. I feel somewhat uncomfortable with today's youth.

We probably have to blame ourselves for what is happening with the fledgeling younger generation. No matter what we say we are living in conditions of prosperity (no one is hungry, poverty-stricken or homeless) and in these conditions the young do not develop the proper moral fiber or inner culture, which leads to crass consumerism and parasitism. The emphasis is on material goods, whereas spiritual values are almost nil.

I believe that, to a large degree, families are at fault, and even more so, the schools which, in my opinion, are not keeping up with the growing demands of the times and contradictions we are experiencing. I had a conversation recently with a person who has many exciting ideas for reforms, but not those that we are trying to bring about. He wants to make profound and major changes in the education system that would make school a center of harmonious all-round development, education and moral upbringing. He believes that children from the age of two or three should begin doing work that they can physically handle, develop an appreciation for literature, music and art. Instruction groups would have to be small and an individual approach be found to the youngsters.

Rishina: Who would agree to such spending?

Aitmatov: It's wrong to economize on public education. Large classrooms, even if the teachers are wonderful, have a negative effect on the students' quality of knowledge and even on their moral development. It isn't education but a profanation when there is only one teacher for fifty children.

At the Kirghiz Party Congress I expressed my concern about this. Using Public School No. 5, one of the best in the city of Frunze, as an example I said that neither the republic's State Planning Committee, nor the Ministry of Public Education, nor the Frunze City Executive Committee, or the appropriate departments of the Cen-

tral Committee had been able over the years and decades to solve the problems of this and other schools where the number of students is growing increasingly, even tripling, but the walls and budgets are not expanding. Society must somehow cut corners in other areas, but increase spending on education. Then we can really talk about scientific and technological progress, then we will have an abundance of talented people with great moral and spiritual potential.

And the Young Communist League (Komsomol) will have to do some soul-searching. I think it has some serious problems: it has lost its militant, unifying, mobilizing and magical spirit. I believe it will have to do some reorganizing as well in order to be more effective with young people and play the same kind of role in their lives as it did when I was young. My generation was genuinely devoted to the Komsomol; and this is no exaggeration.

Mass culture is also having its deadening effect.

Rishina: Valentin Rasputin said once that if Pushkin had not listened to the fairy tales and songs sung by Arina Rodionovna, but the songs of a contemporary pop singer, he would not have become a Pushkin but a Dantes. This is, of course, a hyperbole, the polemical exaggeration of a writer concerned about the spiritual life of young contemporaries. It is not so much a matter of the songs of one singer as it is that young people spend hours listening to cheap and indistinctive songs that can only entertain, distract or attract, but cannot stir them to intellectual pursuits or "noble feelings."

Aitmatov: And what about the violent movies we show from the West! Adults can see such things with a critical eye, but children, teenagers—inexperienced and indiscriminate—soak this up mechanically and imitate it.

We're the only ones who can educate our young, develop their youthful souls. We cannot afford to be complacent and hope that nothing terrible is happening: now they are brutal, heartless and arrogant, but when they grow up they'll change, we'll change them. We won't be able to; it's too hard. It's also naive, to say the least, to assume that a mass secondary education will solve all the problems. On the contrary, the higher the level of education the more difficult moral development is, the more sophisticated and flexible the methods have to be.

Rishina: What information did you have when you included the drug addicts in your novel?
Aitmatov: Of course it was no accident that I dealt with this subject. The bitter letter from the mother of her two drug addict sons, printed recently in the *Literaturnaya gazeta* was further confirmation of this painful problem. For many years we hid this problem from ourselves. I was naturally plagued by this question: why did some of our young people have this illness, what were the reasons, family, personal, that allow the possibility of such a vice in our society? Where does it come from and how does it creep into our country? What kind of social problems can push young people into such self-destruction?

We are the ones, not they, who have something to think about and must answer to ourselves.

Once I went to meet a train at a distant station in the steppe. The train was a few hours late; so having nothing better to do I wandered around. A policeman who apparently recognized me invited me to wait in the police station. When I entered I saw some teenagers behind iron bars in the corner. They had been arrested in a freight train for transporting marijuana. In the other corner was the evidence—backpacks, bags and suitcases full of marijuana. I felt sick.

The letter in the *Literaturnaya gazeta* from that unfortunate mother made me once again think about writing down my thoughts on the subject, even as an article: yes, they broke the law and must be punished, but they have to be helped, we are obligated to find a way to cure them.
Rishina: Why wasn't the continuation of your novel in the seventh issue of *Novy mir*, but in the eighth? When will part three be released?
Aitmatov: People ask me that a lot. I didn't finish reading the galley proofs in time. That's why part two was switched to the eighth issue and the end of the novel will be in the ninth.
Rishina: What are you reading now?
Aitmatov: The Executioner's Block took up all my time, so I haven't been able to read several books I wanted to. I've been looking over Ales Adamovich's *Nothing Is More Important.* And although the subtitle is *Contemporary Problems in Prose About War*, from what I have already read it is clear that the author covers an even broader range of questions when he deals with not only prose

about war but also all Soviet artistic thought and literature in general as well as life. I have no doubts that this soul who is named Ales Adamovich will compel me once again to think and to suffer, will draw me into something kind and real through my suffering and emotions. And I also have no doubts that this is the only way I am able to interpret him. In his new book he talks about ethics and morals, maintaining that the only alternative today is humanism.

We still believe that social realities have to be taken into consideration when we talk about humanism, but, on the other hand, in the nuclear age when humankind and civilization face the threat of extinction we have a broader understanding of humanism than before. We are trying to find a universal approach to universal problems. At a time when the world has achieved such a level of technological development and such a level of contradictions, when in moral terms humankind cannot keep up with what it creates with the help of its intellect and hands, it is extremely important that literature and the arts utilize their resources to have the utmost impact on man, to tell him that there are no convictions, goals or tasks worth the life of humankind. We must learn forever the universal commandment for all—peace and nothing but peace!

1986

TO BE AN ECHO OF THE WORLD

Our meeting in Sofia is further proof that enlightened people are continuing their efforts to somehow establish a dialogue of cultures—in the broadest sense of this concept. We live in societies with different social systems; there are numerous contradictions between us, serious historic contradictions, even conflicts, but nevertheless we share common human roots. That is why we are trying to find the forms through which we can share our knowledge and our experience in various spheres of human endeavor.

Thanks to the gracious invitation from our Bulgarian colleagues we are able to have this "round table" discussion and each of us, naturally, to the best of his or her abilities, will ponder the problems of science, culture and society in the modern world. Of course, this is a broad subject, even boundless. Surely no one could seriously claim to cover it all.

I would like to say the following. It is quite clear that the world is seeing a revolution in science and technology. This revolution is occurring before our eyes, entering into our everyday life, overwhelming us with information, changing the system of communication, and ever more involving us in the sphere of mass culture in its most diverse forms. We are seeing the enormous accumulation of urban population, huge stadiums and theaters that are accessible to all. There is a whole array of other contemporary realities that are the result of indomitable scientific and technological progress. In some cases this progress is a blessing, a source of the enrichment and development of the human intellect. But it also creates numerous complexities in culture and in social life, complexities we face daily.

In connection with this I would like to answer a few questions for my own sake. Actually I cannot answer them, but will just pose them instead.

The era of extensive development has gone into reverse, has exhausted its possibilities. No matter how great

its inertia, scientific and technological progress will rapidly overcome it. My example would be the experience of the Soviet Union where our society, state and every one of us faces, independent of our daily lives, a general and national task—to achieve scientific and technological progress at an accelerated pace. The train of the state-based economy can advance only by acceleration and intensification. All of us understand that very well.

The time has passed when technology existed by itself and did not depend on scientific discoveries. Now the process of renewal is occurring here and there almost simultaneously. Nuclear physics means nuclear reactors, cybernetics—automated systems, computers, etc. Scientific demands give rise to technological quest and, on the contrary, the acute need for new types of technology compels science to hurry up and stimulate scientific research.

Under the influence of the scientific and technological revolution changes are taking place in our consciousness, our psyche, our spiritual life. Understanding of the modern world is being renewed in just the same way as our understanding of ourselves.

How are the ideals shaped by our past meeting the up-to-the-minute needs of the scientific and technological revolution? Isn't the level of modern morality, social self-consciousness and culture lagging behind these demands? What's more, what danger lies in the gap between consciousness and the scientific reality, the gap that is sometimes increasing, sometimes decreasing? What will be the result of computerizing the economy, everyday life and all spheres of our life? Where and how can machines replace man, and in what fields of human endeavor are machines absolutely contraindicated? This, in my opinion, also relates to science. After all, there are certain boundaries beyond which science should not go to invade the secret of secrets. When I read or hear that attempts are being made to reproduce human life in a test tube it is truly frightening.

I am greatly disturbed when I hear people say that in the foreseeable future poetry will be penetrated by computer technology and that this will popularize poetry among the masses. Some people have been saying this at our meeting. It is not a new idea—Pushkin wrote in *Mozart and Salieri* that Salieri attempted to check harmony with algebra and that this was his tragedy, the tragedy of a great master.

I can't help but think that it is a good thing that humankind is only now having to deal with electronic thinking, because perhaps electronic thinking would have impeded the origin of great religious teachings, such as, the Vedda hymns of India; perhaps it would have had a disastrous effect on world poetry; perhaps it would have affected the element of music.

I believe that tragedy is not subject to any computer systems. Tragedy is an element of purely human existence, thought and feeling. Just as it is impossible to determine on a calculator the extent and diversity of human evil and hypocrisy. All that remains outside the sphere of mechanics and computer technology.

That, however, does not mean that art can simply disdainfully ignore science in its latest manifestations. On the contrary, it will continually pose the question: what role can the artist play in analyzing the relationship between the scientific and technological revolution and the individual? What aspect of this subject is the most timely and significant at present? What kind of discoveries would we like to prevent in line with what I have already said? We see a sometimes unrestrained rejoicing over progress or nostalgia, idealization of the past and patriarchal lifestyle. How should we assess these extremes and how do they affect our feelings? What can we expect in future? What kind of urban lifestyle standards will we face?

These are the issues that I and others, of course, are concerned about in general. It does not help to act as though everything is quite simple and is going smoothly.

As for new technologies and powerful industry ensuring man's offensive trends against nature, the perfection of our daily lives and the satisfaction of unlimited requirements, they are all just the tip of a gigantic iceberg whose underwater section is concealed from us in the depths of the ocean due to specialization and division of labour. However, it is precisely in these underwater laboratories of world industry that the iron is being forged for today's technological age.

I would like to repeat that we cannot embrace the boundless; therefore at this "round table" of our European Academy with representatives of the Bulgarian intelligentsia we are talking about superstructure: science, culture and society. Here I would like to point out one more problem. I'll call it a problem of culture or, let's

say, the quality of the individual in the age of the scientific and technological revolution. As a writer I naturally feel especially concerned about this problem.

The scientific and technological revolution has had a deep effect on us, on every individual. We absolutely depend to a large degree on past generations. On the other hand, and just as absolutely, the impact on the individual is growing immeasurably. If people in the 18th or 19th centuries were able to see how we live, what we are experiencing, could see our accomplishments and our anxieties, they would find it hard to comprehend much of it. The threat of nuclear war is a case in point... It has a special way of shaping social relations, intergovernmental relations, and in various ways it shapes the consciousness and style of human behavior.

Andrei Voznesensky, a Soviet poet who is well known in Bulgaria said in one of his poems: "All advances are reactionary if the human being is destroyed." He put it beautifully; this is the experience of poetical thinking. But just what is happening: the human being is being destroyed, and if he is, then how and why?

Perhaps we complain because we have it too good, taking it for granted that we earn our daily bread much easier, that the general standard of living has on the average increased considerably around the world in comparison with the pre-industrial era?

Undoubtedly, one of the main sources of the increasing well-being of humankind is the fact that there has been a long historical period without any major world wars. This has enabled people to take a huge step forward in their development in all spheres, not only in technology, but also in moral and social pursuits. The fact that socialist countries are persistently doing everything possible to maintain peaceful living conditions for all of humankind is to their credit and is to the credit of our socialist community. All of us, to the best of our abilities, support, passionately support precisely that trend in historical development. But let us return to the subject of our conversation.

Sometimes when I have time to myself I think about how the individual is affected by the fact that cosmonauts live in outer space as aliens, that it is becoming increasingly possible for the human being to live among alien, cosmic elements. I also wonder how a person feels at that unimaginable height. After all, an individual is inconceivable without society, away from contempo-

raries, outside the conditions of earth's reality, because it also affects the individual as a separate unit.

However, man is an individual, not simply a unit.

Hence the question: what should be the target or orientation of our culture, our literature and our art in the conditions of total technological progress—the individual or a faceless mass in general? I think this is a very serious question; it could be addressed to all world culture and to all contemporary art. We must find an answer to this question which has become enormously complex today.

One could clearly state that art, culture and literature serve their contemporaries and society as a whole. But, of course, a statement alone is insufficient. We, unfortunately, cannot ignore the spontaneity of mass culture no more than we can ignore the blowing of the wind. Our predecessors did not face this problem of mass culture which is purely a product of our time. Grumbling alone will do nothing. The objective of the intelligentsia, in my opinion, is to analyze and comprehend the path and concrete forms of mass culture and decipher the nature of this phenomenon in order to facilitate, as much as possible, the cultural sovereignty of the individual. I stress: the cultural sovereignty of the individual.

I'll try to explain what I mean by that. Imagine a rushing mountain river and a healer on a horse approaching it with the intention of crossing to the other side where his patients are in the midst of an epidemic. The only hope is that he will be able to cure the disease that is spreading ever wider. But the river is deep and the rapids are forbidding; it may even take the healer's life. He picks up rocks and starts throwing them in the river as he listens to how they fall to the bottom. This is how he determines where the danger is the least and where his horse can most likely get across.

Having reached his destination, he tells the people who are waiting for his help that he put a spell on water, stopped it so he could cross the river, and in this way conquered the rushing river. Naturally, as an individual, as a person with healing skills, he had the moral right to say that in order to boost his reputation as a professional.

Now another person and other people are crossing over to the other side, and following them is all of modern technology. They have built a bridge across the

river and erected an electric power station. The power of man has grown immeasurably; it is even hard to draw a comparison. One crossed the river with difficulty, another conquered the mountain flow and uses its energy for electricity and light. There is a legend about the first one, but those who came after him—the bulldozer operator, the engineer and the builder—are not remembered, no one is interested in them as individuals.

This example, this comparison, leads me to a sad conclusion. The fact that we see the bulldozer operator as merely a nameless builder of an electric power station is evidence that we have lost sight of the individual, we talk more about the collective and less about the individuals. Therefore I think we should reaffirm the sovereignty of the individual which I believe is being undermined, sometimes deliberately, by mass forms of thought and behavior. How can we go about reaffirming this sovereignty? I have no ready solutions, but I am firmly convinced that it is very important to preserve traditions of the past, the genuine values of the human spirit, including ethnic features and the distinctive traits of cultures, as an obstacle to overall unification.

These problems, as I see it, face any society regardless of its social foundations.

It would be naive to think that one section of the public is being disastrously influenced by mass culture while the other has already developed a strong immunity. It's another matter that the advantages of our socialist lifestyle enable us to more effectively defend the cultural sovereignty of the individual. But we must learn how to utilize these advantages.

The creation of cultural traditions is always a very complex process. Looking into the past, we see that the vast majority of the population was illiterate and underdeveloped and that this kept them away from cultural values, the values of literature and the arts. Today, as paradoxical as it may seem, we are observing another kind of complication. Today there are illiterate people, but there are no illiterate masses, no backward and ignorant peoples—television, radio and films reach everyone. But there is no way to get around the fact that these same means of mass communication and mass media help standardize thought, standardize culture and standardize the individual. It's one thing when a television program unites a billion people mentally and spiritually in one and the same historical situation and promotes

noble and humane ideas. That is magnificent. But when the same program imposes on everyone the same musical rhythms and creates the same idols it is a catastrophe because the individual is involved in this process only superficially, like a tune that is popular today but forgotten tomorrow. In this case both intellectual energy and time are wasted with no result. By no means are we always able to curb this flow, this onslaught of mass culture.

The only thing that can counteract it is genuine artistic skill. Under the circumstances one of the main tasks, in my opinion, is—without denying the progressive significance of the scientific and technological revolution as such—to create the kind of climate, the kind of art, the kind of literature, promote the kind of culture that would facilitate the qualitative perfection of the individual. This task can be resolved at various levels, by various methods, by various forces, but I think there should always be a single goal. After all, danger lies not only in upsetting the ecological balance when we see for ourselves that if we harm the environment, nature the loss is irreparable. That can be understood by everyone. But we do not always realize how much harm the unrestrained and thoughtless development of technology does to the individual and culture.

Dostoyevsky strived to understand whether beauty could save the world. Naturally, what is meant by beauty is something more than beauty in itself. It is the whole complex of humankind's spiritual state. Looking at things realistically, we must recognize that Dostoyevsky lived in more peaceful times when a universal and global threat to human existence did not yet exist. Nevertheless he somehow instinctively foresaw future anxieties and came out with his prophetic thought.

Today the question of the role of literature and art in the life of modern man is particularly urgent. Very many temptations arise because of the "benefits" of mass culture which diverts people and humankind from reality. Sport is also a relevant subject. I am not opposed to sport, but when idol worshipping enters into the picture, it also damages a person's spiritual world. The same thing is true of other mass productions. They distract people, deprive them of the opportunity to seriously and fundamentally understand themselves and their epoch. If people do not take up the challenge of the times, if they are deprived of the opportunity of delving

into their inner being, negative forces, the same ones that introduce fear and threat into modern society, will gain the upper hand and have more opportunity to influence people's minds and hearts.

Because of all this, I would like to say that Dostoyevsky's thought that beauty would save the world is true and relevant today. Of course, we live in a completely different era and this thought should be expanded on in more complex terms.

Based on my experience as a writer, I would like to say, in conclusion, that the individual, I believe, is still the main object of modern writers.

It's another matter that by talking about the individual and through him the writer strives to talk to all people. If he is a true writer, he is involved in the affairs of all humankind, not just a certain regional environment that he is linked with ethnically and culturally. The affairs of society are an extremely complex interlacing of historical, moral and artistic factors. Therefore it is necessary to tell people about everything within the orbit of our consciousness. Writers have to have a feel for the 1917 socialist revolution, the victory over fascism and the first flight into outer space; they must depict all this because no one after us can recreate the current reality as sharply and deeply as the contemporary writer. It is important for all fundamental changes that have transformed the fate of humankind to be understood and experienced through suffering, to become part of spiritual life.

Maxim Gorky said that a writer should listen not to the echo of his soul, but should himself be an echo of the world. That is precisely how a writer should comprehend history. Only if his soul is overflowing with suffering, love for man and humaneness can he serve humankind. I am convinced that it is necessary to return the true meaning to concepts reflecting the essence and purpose of art, concepts that were understood by those writers that today we call the classics. Let's admit that they thought in broader and more bold terms than many of our contemporaries in literature and the arts. However this admission does not free us from carrying out our duty.

I shall repeat: whatever we should and can do, no one else can do for us. To see and to understand what the modern world is like—what we are like—means being not only witnesses and observers, but also the creators

of a wonderful world, present and future. This means feeling complicity with the human spirit, a feeling incomparable to any other, because to be involved in the process of construction is to find one's place in this process.

I am glad to be in the capital of fraternal Bulgaria, among friends and colleagues. I think that our "round table" discussions organized in Sofia by the European Academy of Science, Arts and Literature is of enormous significance, since the European Academy is a very representative forum. It would be a sin if we did not take advantage of this wonderful opportunity and jointly consider the various aspects of the movement of the spirit in the modern world.

1985

I BELIEVE IN MAN

Conversation with *Pravda* Journalists Yuri Razumov and Victor Khatuntsev

Journalists: Throughout history people have contemplated the age-old concepts of the times and morals, conscience and vanity, good and evil, truth and lies. Now in the middle of the 1980s we find ourselves in a kind of power field of high moral voltage when much of what is true and what is false needs to be distinctly defined and separated from one another—what is plus and what is minus. What in your opinion makes these problems of morality, social justice and spirituality so urgent these days?

Aitmatov: The changes that are now under way in our society. I think this sense of urgency would have come about sooner or later. Each generation has its own kind of catharsis—self-purification. People accumulate their own experience of being whose comprehension has never been an easy matter, to say nothing of correcting mistakes. Our society is now at that historical turning point. In fact all spheres of life are geared to changes. Perestroika is under way along the entire front from the economy to culture. Although we remember other reforms and "alterations," they were not attended by profound moral quests among broad sections of the public and were not aimed so directly at each individual. Now the situation appears to be different. What has happened?

Experience, the ordinary experience of this generation has shown that moral culture and spiritual education change slowly. And if this process used to be somehow invisible against the background of the grandiose economic tasks, it has gradually come to influence all aspects of life, including the economy. Today's problems tell us unequivocally what the influence was. The most important capital a people has is moral culture. If this does not exist you cannot expect a high degree of conscientiousness.

The world has become more dynamic. We have to take

into account psychological stress, the flow of diverse information and the threat of thermonuclear war. All of this affects man and humankind. The development of technology has led to the predominance of a technocratic approach and has shown that humanitarian thinking isn't at a high enough level. But humanism in both significant and insignificant matters depends on how much people value the concepts of community, social equality, truth, sincerity and kindness. We should not forego those moral principles that characterize our social system as a model of achieving humankind's ideals. Among these principles are the basic ones—conscientious work that benefits the society, humane relations and mutual respect between people, honesty and truthfulness, and an uncompromising attitude to injustice. As a matter of fact these are integral elements of conscience and conscience is the driving force behind civic stance.

In this connection I would like to say that the concept of morality, in my opinion, is not subject to any innovations, especially primitive politization. Morality is the primary law of being for man. Every generation, every individual accepts it as a stable and sacred heritage from his ancestors. The main thing is that man and society in general always strictly abide by these standards—in all matters, from the significant to the insignificant.

The need for morality, sincerity, high principles, and strict correspondence between words and deeds is especially increasing today in the context of perestroika under way and the reexamination of many aspects of our life. Unfortunately in recent years some people totally lacked inner moral restraints, lost all their conscience. After all, genuine human qualities are fully expressed when a person lives by his conscience, when his deeds are motivated only by his own conscience, his inner judge, which is primary and infallible. It is not always easy to act according to conscience, but it is this dignity of conscience that fills society with lofty ideas and dreams and helps keep the eternal principles of morality absolutely pure. But unfortunately deviations from the ideal, including very serious ones, are unavoidable. Don't we have a lot to think seriously about if we are already talking openly about conscience and duplicity, outright deception in the economy, management and judicial departments.

Journalists: Pravda often receives letters asking the logical

question—why did we keep quiet before when we saw and understood what was happening?
Aitmatov: When you say "we" do you mean "you" the writers?
Journalists: No, "we" means just that—we.
Aitmatov: All right. Let's continue our discussion in that frame of reference...

The confrontation of good and evil is never peaceful; they are engaged in constant struggle with each other. In ordinary everyday life this confrontation is often expressed by a commonplace compromise: a thief is mildly called a lifter and a total fool is called incompetent in this or that. Compromises are all right with many: with those whose conscience is not clear and with those who are honest but who do not want to make waves. Semi-truths, semi-measures and partial punishments become "beneficial." Morality sometimes falls in place with convenient coexistence with a vice, i.e. the ceiling of morally permissible sins is lowered. And so in fact people saw and understood what was happening but far from all of them put up a fight. I would like to point out that as living standards rise many people lose their uncompromising attitude to shortcomings, I would say, lose their revolutionary fervor.

However, let's be frank: today compromise as a "means of existence" is far from extinct. We won't clarify many things in the recent past, which means we won't learn lessons for the future if this time again we don't figure out once and for all why we do not always take control of ourselves. Sometimes a person realizes he should not do a certain thing, but does it anyway, tries not to hear what his conscience dictates and deceives himself. This is what is most destructive—it degrades him as a person and ruins his life. It is a pity we do not always remember this.

And there is another question: how power, big and small, ends up in the hands of people who have no moral right to it. What qualities are, as a rule, required of a person to be promoted to a high post? Does he have to be a hard and reliable worker who is demanding and morally stable? Yes. But what about his moral credo? Is it in line with the high moral goals of our society? Is he honest and fair? Unfortunately these qualities are often regarded as secondary in holding a management position. That is why we are constantly hearing about management crimes—corruption, bribe-taking, deceptive

reporting, patronage and mutual guarantees. A person with no conscience is capable of the most sophisticated anti-social activities.

And what if such forces of public pressure are limited as openness, criticism, control and inevitable punishment? Then things are really bad. Now all of society, including us writers, must work even more energetically on improving the whole climate of our life. These efforts should be seen in concrete actions by each of us. A person's moral qualities are always in direct relation to how well organized and diligent he is. It's also important to see that a clean breeze has fundamentally swept away the cobwebs from many of our moss-grown corners.

Journalists: Of course the first thing we need to do to secure perestroika in our society is to promote ideological and educational measures as noted in the Party's documents. But the problem is that many traditional forms and methods of ideological and moral education do not meet modern needs. In short, we are often still unable to reach people. Why is that?

Aitmatov: Education is something that has to be done with one person at a time. First you have to shape the individual! And this work cannot be gauged according to some "average per capita statistic." In principle any person comes to one or another conviction, but not right away, over the years, through practical experience and the social psychology of the environment. The result of this inner development, however, is not always in favor of our world outlook. Deviations from the norms of morality are reflected, as a rule, in some concrete acts and small offences. But this is already action. If we look deeper we will see that probably the most terrible thing is ideological duplicity and the acquisition of social benefits and social status by abandoning moral principles.

Why is it that in similar conditions one person is decent and the other capable of misdeeds? I won't get into psychology; it's clear that in ideological and moral education we should have long ago given up general slogans, uniform approaches and theorizing unrelated to practice and modern needs. Often good beginnings quickly become formalistic actions. This produces functionaries that turn a viable idea into a dead dogma.

To be sure, dogmatism can follow any system and any idea. There isn't any idea that can be guaranteed against dogmatism. What is behind dogmatism? Formalism which

fosters bureaucratic behavior and dismal pedantry. But people's minds do not accept that style and method of propaganda, especially today. Now we are increasingly seeking other approaches to the human spirit. Here the main thing is for people to know the truth. Although it is not always such an easy matter, sincerity and honesty must be uppermost in informing the public.

Journalists: I remember five years ago we talked about the hunger some of our young people have for foreign things and for popular Western music...

Aitmatov: Do you think there are less young people like that now or less such attitudes? It's understandable: after all we are not the only ones in this world of ours. I see here still another problem. For a long time we bragged about our socialist advantages, boasting of our achievements when deserved and undeserved. More than one generation became accustomed to this. But the world is no longer what it used to be, which means we have to be more flexible and sophisticated in our understanding of the relationship and interdependence of its opposing civilizations. After all, we have something to learn from the West in terms of production and technology and especially in the service industry. In the spirit of the times and for the sake of our goals it is important for us to find some kind of dynamic equivalent that can compete with the "Western toys" some of our young people find so appealing.

Journalists: It seems that recently people are not so worried any more that the attraction the young have for jeans or rock music is going to be followed by "alien" sentiments. However we shouldn't forget that the ideological struggle will continue. Some people wonder if we aren't hurting ourselves by talking so openly about our shortcomings, especially in relation to problems with the young.

Aitmatov: Lenin referred to openness (glasnost) as a sward that heals wounds. This is true. Lessons learned from the past are a means of doing away with mistakes today, of more clearly seeing today the shoots and signs of tomorrow. We have been very frank about things lately. This helps the young choose their road. But each new generation has its own tasks, its own understanding of its relationship with the people and with its history. Why must we be annoyed when the young want to get to the truth themselves, break down stereotypes and express their attitude to life? It is their right as young peo-

ple, the earliest social expression of the heart. By attempting to make all young people alike and shape them into one mold we merely develop in our children, the next generation, superficial obedience that sometimes swings around to misdeeds. When we are dealing with some special passion among the young for Western trends we have to be flexible. At the same time we have to block whatever is clearly dangerous or evil. Drug addiction is an especially intolerable evil!

I have already said that any vice from the West should be a warning and a lesson to us. I, for instance, decisively condemn unemployment which causes so many people to suffer in the West. We do not have unemployment; everyone seems to be working. But when you look around you can see a hard worker and a loafer working in one shop, living on the same landing and in similar apartments... No, I cannot condone this either. Is this the way equality and humaneness should work in a socialist society? How long are we going to rely on conscience or reeducation? I think it's time to remunerate people for their work and abilities and put an end to the practice of wage-levelling.

Journalists: We received a letter from V. Nesterovich in Minsk who writes that he really likes Boston, the character in your book *The Executioner's Block* who works conscientiously and infects all his subordinates with the same attitude. He made good people out of many of those who worked under him; he taught them to work and to value life itself through their work. Boston never liked or understood those who did not aspire to this goal. He regarded such types as useless; he was cold and unfriendly to them. He knew that for this reason many called him names behind his back—a hard cookie and a kulak—and regretted that he wasn't born earlier or his bones would have been rotting in the snows of Siberia. As a rule Boston never responded to abuse because he never doubted that the truth was on his side. It couldn't be otherwise or the world would turn upside down. He was just as sure of that as he was certain the sun rises in the east.

V. Nesterovich asks why Boston and Edigei Buranny, and many other heroes, are forced to stand up for the sacred right to integrity?

Aitmatov: Unfortunately such qualities as diligence, conscientiousness and integrity, human qualities that have always been valued, are far from always at the top

of the list in educating and shaping character. Many are convinced that it's all right to be successful through impudence, shrewdness and reaping the benefits of a cushy job in commerce or the service industry, or in an overseas position. This is a distortion of the notion of social justice and the substitution of the criteria in judging a person's true worth, although material well-being does not have to be counterposed to the pursuit of spiritual wealth. However we cannot help but notice that people with a consumer mentality, with their inevitable philistine militancy, do not mind shoving aside those who strive for moral ideals and seek spiritual perfection. This confrontation sometimes takes on acute forms.

Journalists: What can we offer to counter that? Do you remember how approximately twenty-five years ago when a woman from the village of Sheker was mistreated, it wasn't such a simple thing for you to publicly state in her defense—"It's your fault fellow-villagers!" How do you view a civic stance today?

Aitmatov: I think the words speak for themselves. They denote an active and principled position. Today a civic stance primarily means actively facilitating perestroika. The most important quality of human nature is the desire for self-assertion as an individual. If a person cannot do this or crude formalism kills any desire to be active then disillusionment sets in and true individuality hides behind the faceless mask of a mediocre person following instructions. The times, however, demand strong personalities!

Yes, a person is constantly facing a choice—to bide time or get in there and fight for justice. It all depends on whether he's convinced he's right, on his character and on his compassion for others. Life presents each of us with the possibility of defending our convictions. In today's conditions this is particularly necessary. We must facilitate moral purification, assert moral principles, learn the skills of free competition of opinions and ideas—the skills of polemics. After all, many negative phenomena can and should be nipped in the bud.

Today's orientation on democratizing our life and the relationship between the individual and society is an urgent and very important issue in our development. And again, under no circumstances must we simplify or speed up this process. As has already been said, we have to learn to live in conditions of democracy and glasnost. Our interests should be cooperative; then an honest person

will see that his position is important to the cause, that he is not just a cog in a wheel, but a full-fledged citizen of a free and large nation.

Public institutions will also have to change, turn toward man and his needs. Here much depends on leaders and how they understand the tasks of the times.

Journalists: When you read the documents of the 18th Congress of the Communist Party of Kirghizia held a year ago you cannot help but notice how personnel were promoted in the republic in the past. Many people were chosen on the basis of their personal loyalty, if they were relatives or fellow villagers. Personnel matters were decided individually and servility and intrigue were encouraged... What, in your opinion, can prevent a leadership that is deliberately mediocre and has shown its worth not in deeds but by being subservient to superiors?

Aitmatov: Who could argue against promoting into leadership positions people who are intelligent and talented leaders capable of putting the interests of public affairs above their own. Naturally such people must also be disciplined in following instructions. But this doesn't mean they have to be blindly obedient. On the contrary, a person in a leadership position should be an independent thinker, be free of any kind of ties and patronage, be capable of persisting in his opinion and taking risks. Precisely such people have to be sought out, trained and promoted. In this process there should be more glasnost and more consultation with the people.

I'm pleased to increasingly see newspaper articles talking about employees choosing their own managers. I'm pleased by reports about competition for the job of team leader and shop foreman. We should have more of that! Such democratic forms should run throughout the social structure—from top to bottom. Otherwise we have a situation in which the district authorities bring a new chairman to a collective farm and say: "Vote for him in the election." But who is he, is he good with people? No one knows.

Honestly speaking we have to admit right out that we have not totally eliminated the influence of the personality cult which is still deep inside all of us, in our style of work and in our relationships.

The recent past has shown that a conciliatory attitude to defects in education and style of leadership and the regeneration of the personality cult does nothing but

revive former negative phenomena. Now we have finally rid ourselves of at least those pompous titles in referring to a society's leader. In the past when someone was introduced in public we first heard a whole string of titles and awards. Today we are at least not concerned about how and to what extent we should sing someone's praise. However, not all is perfect in this respect either.

In short, the survivals of the personality cult is one of our "difficult problems," and although we are acting as if it does not exist, in fact it does and is quite obvious from time to time. It was particularly evident in the works of literature and the arts in the 1970s and early 1980s.

Journalists: When we speak of democratization we cannot help but take into consideration those who cannot wait for perestroika to die a natural death and for life itself to force us to return to the time-tested volitional style and methods both in the economy and in social relations. You have many years of experience behind you and have done a lot of thinking... What do you have to say about this?

Aitmatov: Those who long for the past are largely to blame for the acute problems we face today. If you would say that to their face they would gasp: "What do you mean?! We're ahead. We've achieved this and that!" It is they who think they are ahead. Until the economy rises to a new level they have no reason to take much credit.

The times we are fated to be in are not simple. I repeat, they are dampened primarily by the threat of a nuclear apocalypse. But we pin all our hopes on man, on his reason, soul and humanistic essence both on the cosmic scale and in terms of our own domestic problems and quests. Yes, our society is at a turning point, in a revolutionary period. The scalpel of glasnost has many sores to excise. Moral problems have been affected by the fact that no one has spoken about them for so long and some negative phenomena have even been encouraged. That is why ideology requires fundamental revamping.

Meanwhile we have no cause for illusory optimism when some people are already hastening to claim that these first steps are actually a major advance. But it is also wrong to be pessimistic. I believe that the spiritual strength of man, our enormous and complex experience

in overcoming difficulties, the moral attitude of the people and their self-awareness will add a qualitatively new content to the times and to the life of our country. We should enter the 21st century as a renewed and dynamic society whose main wealth and hope is Man! A Man of high moral standards!

1987

II. I BOW MY HEAD. ABOUT SOVIET AND WORLD CULTURAL FIGURES

GUIDE OF CONSCIENCE

Throughout history there have always been forces telling people that life is fleeting, man is a nonentity, is alone and powerless in the face of fate, in the face of history. He is told: "You are just a speck of dust blown by the wind of time into non-existence: life is perishable; life is nothing." He is told: "Why seek justice, why appeal to conscience, why the need for revolutionary clashes, why oppose evil: evil is eternal in the world of people."

In defiance of all this, overcoming the enormous complication of development, advancing through rebellions, through barricades and fires, through wars and revolutions, throughout history, man has been struggling for self-assertion on earth. In the name of life, in the name of asserting his immortal purpose on earth, man has achieved unprecedented accomplishments in labour, science, culture and social progress. At the same time man, by reflecting his spiritual essence, the infinite world of human feelings, his ideals of what is beautiful, noble and thereby asserting himself in his own eyes as a creator, has created art, man has given rise to great artists whose names rightfully instill pride.

William Shakespeare is a universal phenomenon and the celebration of the anniversary of his birth is not simply a tribute to the fame of Britain's eminent playwright, but something much more. I believe it would be no exaggeration to say today that along with other brilliant artists of various peoples and times, Shakespeare, as a thinker and poet, is the living flesh of the inner world of modern man, is the living part of his soul. And therefore I think that it would be no exaggeration to say that in the name of Shakespeare we confirm the power of the human intellect, its continuity, its immortality and its internationalist nature. In the name of Shakespeare we confirm the highest mission of art in society.

And today each one of us can rightfully exclaim—"My Shakespeare! Our Shakespeare!"

Allow me to use this opportunity to say a few words about Shakespeare. I realize very well how hard it is to say something new, because fundamental studies have been made of Shakespeare. I will only talk about him from the point of view of an ordinary reader and spectator.

Sometimes I catch myself thinking: after all, in Shakespeare's time there were other well-known writers and poets in his and other countries. But only Shakespeare and Cervantes managed to come down to us through the ages and continue to have such a great impact on people after many hundreds of years. How was that possible? If we can imagine Shakespeare and his colleagues of those days as guides heading into the future, leading their caravans, then we have to say that Shakespeare was the most viable of them all. Those who started out with him got off the road of history long ago. Some died of their own impotence, others from the fact that the goods they were carrying became devaluated, and still others lost their wares when they were caught up in the storms of revolution, when the eras of new ideas, new social systems rejected them, did not find in them anything useful for themselves. Only Shakespeare's caravan continues to march on around the world, crossing the space of time, and literally the borders of states, mountains, villages and rivers. As time goes on more people take advantage of its gifts and Shakespeare becomes more and more popular. Shakespeare lives in all languages and dialects. Here I would like to note the great service Russian language and Russian culture has done for Shakespeare. It is through Russian that many peoples in the East were able to shift from ancient eposes to the works of Shakespeare in their own languages, to the masterpieces of world culture. I would like to say more on that later, but now I want to continue my thought about the Shakespeare caravan.

Indeed, why is Shakespeare so viable, why does he captivate us, people of the 20th century? It is hard to answer that right away. In the past few centuries many serious treatises have been written about the genius of Shakespeare, about his philosophy, his social problems, his artistic images and contradictions. Without delving too deeply, I will have to speak in simple terms. As paradoxical as it may seem, Shakespeare as an artist and thinker is as simple as he is great. Probably this is precisely what makes him so popular and accessible to

all. I do not think we are attracted to Shakespeare because his plays give us an exotic glimpse into early times, court life or royalty. The secret of Shakespeare's creativity is apparently in the fact that, without sophistry, he expressed and analyzed through amazingly artistic images the most basic, elementary and eternal problems of human existence, the interrelationship of the individual and society. That is, he was able to find the most emotional core of the subject of art, because the subject of art is primarily the study of human beings.

What is the noblest purpose of man, the meaning of his life? These are the simple and eternal problems that troubled Shakespeare and that continue to interest us, his descendants. In order to answer these historical questions of life, Shakespeare had to come up with unprecedented artistic and philosophical solutions. He had to be a tireless volcano of human passions. In order to answer these simple questions Shakespeare had to most fervently expose evil, cunning, baseness, love of power and tyranny. In order to answer these questions Shakespeare praised in his heroes freedom of thought and spirit, the irreconcilable struggle between good and evil. He extolled the advocates of justice, people with the noblest qualities of human conscience. He made saints of heroic people, whose heroism was expressed in noble actions, in purity of conscience, purity of love, purity of thoughts and motives. He succeeded in all this and because of this feat his name became immortal. Despite the fact that many of his heroes die tragically in clashes with the dark forces of evil, meet up with calamity (incidentally, to some extent, herein lies the truthfulness of his realism and historicism), we see that they are life-asserting tragedies, the moral victory of light over darkness, new over old, positive over negative.

I repeat that I am giving a somewhat schematic picture of the works of Shakespeare, assuming that everyone has a clear idea of the depth and complexity of Shakespeare's images. I can only express my admiration for the realistic mastery of this artist in the era of Enlightenment. I can only be amazed by the vital wholeness of Shakespeare's heroes who are filled with all the truly human qualities: a complicated array of inner contradictions, doubt, envy, love, hate, reflection and torment about social duty and one's personal destiny. How often we who write about contemporary life lack that artistic intensity and breadth! I have brought this up here be-

cause our time, our realities, the heroism and labour of the Soviet people are filled with such historic events and victories, such deep processes of spiritually forming the new person that we have still not fulfilled our duty to society. I say this because we should take lessons from Shakespeare. And mainly because we deeply believe that Shakespeare is a great writer of positive heroes, humaneness and purposefulness. I stress, precisely positive heroes, that is, heroes who were created by Shakespeare, his ideal and love. No matter which of his plays we examine, we see characters who are vivid, whole-hearted and passionate. Precisely these amazing heroes who are burning inside with the heat of great passions, irreconcilable in combating evil, unwilling to compromise with their conscience, charging against everything base and dark in life, are dear to us and beloved. Whether it's Hamlet, Othello, Lear or Romeo and Juliette, or other characters, we see behind their titles and lifestyle their fundamental human essence; we identify with their joys and sorrows as though they are our contemporaries. We see in Shakespeare's possitive heroes the eternal depth of the human soul, the boundaries of which are hard to determine; beginning with the noble intellect and heroic energy of Hamlet who collapses under court intrigues and ending with the purest feelings of love expressed by young Romeo and Juliette, such sentiments and thoughts that throughout the centuries remain relevant and fill our hearts with pain and suffering and instill in us the noble principles of good. I think that it is also important to note in connection with Shakespeare's anniversary that in the West some people try to make literature and art void of ideas, deny the educational role of the positive hero in literature and the theater, abstractly reflect reality. Perhaps those people believe that Shakespeare is old-fashioned and naive. Undoubtedly, much has changed since then on our planet... But the main essence and purpose of art are still the same—to serve the interests of the people, to provide a true and realistic portrayal of man and life.

The unfading works of Shakespeare prove once again that only art that is genuinely true, that belongs to the people, magnificent art that reflects the traits of the era of the individual survives and continues to belong to society.

If we carefully heed the motion of our time we can always hear how Shakespeare's caravan continues along

its road to the future. This great guide of the conscience, purity and grandeur of man progresses from generation to generation, with no end to his travels around the world.

I would like to say here with special pride that it was the establishment of Soviet government that brought Shakespeare's caravan to us, to Central Asia. From the very outset, as soon as our theaters were built, Shakespeare's plays were performed in our native languages and we delved into the spring waters of his art in order to quench our age-old thirst for the universal cultural heritage. Theaters in Central Asia feature many of Shakespeare's dramas, his tragedies and comedies, operas and ballets based on his works. We now have a large number of outstanding performers popular among the people for their excellent portrayals of Shakespearean characters. At this jubilee meeting, on behalf of the intelligentsia of Central Asia, I would like to join in with them in paying tribute to the great genius of Shakespeare.

In Shakespeare, who lives among us, we see the continuity of the living experience of man and the accumulation of culture confirming the people's concept of the magnificent.

No, man is not a speck of dust, if for no other reason that he has such representatives of the human race as Shakespeare.

And Shakespeare is like the surf that continually thunders on the ocean's shore!

1964

OUR GORKY

History has seen many great writers and thinkers who have exalted the art of the human genius. They are not forgotten by their descendants. However, no matter how great they were, the factor of time and the eternal advance of life revises our thinking about our predecessors. It is precisely for this reason that some of them eventually recede into the background, continuing to be seen above the horizon. As we turn to them, gazing at them through the haze of the past, we sometimes exclaim: "Yes, they were giants!"

Others that are not inferior by any means and even closer to us, more necessary in the sense that we cannot imagine ourselves without them, do not recede from us. They are like bridges that lie on the path of life. They are the bridges of thought and spirit, bridges connecting generations of people, linking the world around the main ethical questions on earth, bridges that contain the accumulation of cultural values and the experience of spiritual knowledge. They are bridges that you and I walk over every day, where we meet with the past and present, where we seek questions to the most complex problems of social and personal life, where we learn how to dream and to love, to distinguish good and evil, lies and truth, wherein we clash and struggle with those who would like to shake the foundations of these bridges, who would like to cut off people's access to them, who would like in this way to sow in us mistrust of the convictions, quests, anxieties and reflections of these writers who eternally live and fight.

I am talking about writers of epochal significance who have lived beyond their time in the relentless and passionate struggle for the freedom and happiness of man, for the affirmation of new ideals of human existence, writers symbolizing by their works and their personalities the major changes in history, in culture, in the lifestyle of a nation, country and the world.

Gorky was such a writer.

Gorky entered the world of literature with tireless thoughts about Russia, with expectations and thirst for radical changes in people's destinies, with premonitions of revolutionary transformation in the country. He cherished everything that existed in Russia, with all its mutually exclusive contradictions, with its chains and freedom-loving thought, with its humbleness and furious impulses for a new life, with its patriarchal submissiveness and indomitable, rebellious spirit. He took all this in his heart with pain, anxiety and hope and he spoke of Russia with such epic strength, with such knowledge about the people, with such faith in their revolutionary purpose, that what he saw and said became a new page in Russian literature, a new discovery in the development of artistic thought of the 20th century.

The creative experience of Gorky, the traditions of Gorky became the fundamental principles of Soviet literature and art. I would like to say a few words about these traditions of Gorky's and about how they have been continued in our literature.

It is common knowledge that no one establishes traditions at one's own discretion. Traditions originate from a writer's objective experience; they are not used on orders or at request, but because of a vital need for them. They are life-giving as long as they correspond to reality, as long as they facilitate the enrichment of a new content and new forms of art.

More than once voices from the West have tried to dissuade us of the truth and the viability of Gorky's traditions. We have been told that Gorky is past history in literature, that his experience has already been exhausted, that more complex and more contradictory routes are being developed today in literature and the arts, etc., etc. But what is the real situation?

Many years have passed since Gorky died. In this time the world had experienced a chain of unprecedented upheavals. Hitler—with his obscurantism, his misanthropic theories, his destruction of any kind of dissent and all the best in culture, World War II, the defeat of fascism at the price of an ocean of blood, torment and suffering of peoples, the postwar sobering up and the onset of the cold war, and the new outbreaks of imperialist wars on the planet. And new brutalities of people against people today, at this very moment in the long-suffering land of Vietnam! And in this clash of worlds, in this

caldron of history, amidst chaos in one part of the Western intelligentsia, amidst the disillusionment and confusion in another section, amidst outright appeals for the "deheroization," "deideologization" of art, amidst mistrust of human reason and the assertion of man's "uncommunicative nature" with others like him and with the surrounding world or things, amidst covert and overt efforts to free man from a sense of responsibility preventing him from realizing his human and civic duty, amidst the unbridled propogation of violence, base instincts, the universal model of the notorious "superman," amidst all this, amidst the deafening thunder of "mass," "commercial," "industrial" and other products of "supercultures" intended to eliminate the dramatism of contradictions, appease and indoctrinate the philistine, amidst all this convulsive casting about we hear the never silent voice of Gorky from our shore asking: "Masters of culture, whose side are you on?".

This is the first commandment of his traditions. For behind these words is the eternal question: what's the purpose of writing, what should be written and how should it be written? Gorky's voice is our voice, the voice of Soviet literature. And we shall never tire of repeating these words; we are following him, seeing in him the yardstick of a writer's conscience, seeing in him the ultimate example of militant humanism, humaneness and spiritual beauty.

As evidenced by Gorky's new principles of portraying reality, his aesthetic and philosophical conceptions, he was a supreme master of world realism. Before us is a writer of uncompromising social clarity, a writer who was of the people and of a high culture that had incorporated all the best of world literature. Hence his writing, filled with the authentic truth of life is so convincing and has such a powerful impact on us. Gorky's realism remains a criterion for modern realistic writing. We follow the traditions of Gorky because these traditions are part of our inner creative need, because they help us more objectively understand and express our reality, facilitate the objectives of literature in building a communist society.

Naturally the traditions of Gorky are not a prescribed route that we simply have to follow enthusiastically. Along this all but smooth road, together with indisputable accomplishments, there have always been and always will be difficulties and even failures. The point is

that, having before us a common ideological and artistic route, each of us working independently creates in accordance with his strength and abilities and, in this way, each of us has to face directly whatever new tasks arise, new problems in creativity and new life situations. The point is that the development of literature is a complex process comprised of numerous individual parts. But it is also quite true that on the road of socialist realism, that reflects in art the experience of the given social relations, the given spiritual activity of people, there will be new discoveries, new achievements of literature and art. We are not novices in this world; we have behind us half a century of struggle, victories, reflections, anxieties and quests, and this gives us the right to foresee our possibilities, have faith in our strength, believe in the fruitfulness of the traditions of Soviet literature which were first forged by the great Gorky.

We know what an invaluable role Gorky played in the development of literature among this country's various ethnic groups. But still I would like to mention this again.

The appearance of modern professional literature in Central Asia and Kazakhstan was an act of unprecedented cultural and social progress. And this was a big boon for us—from the very outset our writers were influenced by Gorky. They were still seeking, still developing, carrying inside themselves the anger, suffering and aspirations of their peoples who had just been awakened by the 1917 socialist revolution. These first writers had yet to comprehend the changes in the lives of their peoples, not only from a political but an artistic point of view, and they had to make up for their former underdevelopment. Gorky's influence on them was a symbolically significant fact. The Russian proletariat, Lenin and the Communist Party inspired our peoples to social struggle, to become involved in building the Soviet system, whereas the Russian writer Gorky was a spiritual school for the literature of the various Soviet peoples. The imprint of his influence was clearly reflected in the creativity of our first revolutionary writers, such as Hamza-Hakim-Zade Niyazi and Saken Seifullin. Gorky had a tremendous impact on realistic writing, on the epic and social content of the works of the major writers of the East—Mukhtar Auezov and Sadriddin Aini. A whole array of well-known writers of the older generation

were raised on the traditions of Gorky—Aibek, Tursun-Zade, Kerbabaev, Tokombaev, Mukanov, Musrepov, Kahhar, Mustafin and many others. How can we remember this today without a sense of gratitude!

Gorky was the father of the friendship of cultures among the Soviet peoples. He was the banner of our internationalist fraternity and ideological unity of all Soviet cultural figures.

May we continue to preserve the spirit of Gorky—the great classic of Soviet literature, the outstanding writer—humanist of the 20th century.

Gorky continues to live.

Gorky is with us.

1970

HE KNEW A MILLION LINES OF THE *MANAS* TALE

A few years ago the monthly *Soviet Union* published my article entitled "He Knows a Million Lines of the Manas Tale." It was about Sayakbai Karalaev, the outstanding storyteller of the *Manas* epos. Today that title has to be corrected to "He Knew a Million Lines..." Yes, unfortunately, we already have to talk about that in the past tense.

The day before yesterday funeral services were held for Sayakbai Karalaev. It is an enormous, irreparable loss to Kirghiz culture. Karalaev was famous among all the Kirghiz. The *Manas* epos did not originate exactly as we know it today. The creative genius of the Kirghiz people developed over a period of many centuries, incorporating Kirghiz history, the people's understanding of the world and their poetic gift. The *Manas* tale was born like a tiny brook in times long past. The brook turned into a river, becoming increasingly wider apart and a stormy sea of Kirghiz poetry splashed onto the Kirghiz land. Karalaev learned the epos when it was in its summit.

In order to grasp the full breadth of the ancient legend, in order to preserve the story of *Manas* in the face of the past and the present, the storyteller had to be exceptionally intelligent, have a phenomenal memory, colossal fantasy and artistic talent. Such was our Karalaev who devoted his entire life to the art of *Manas*.

He is no longer among us. He was like a blazing comet that flickered out. Will another star like that of Karalaev once again light up the sky of *Manas*? One wonders. And one cannot help but look with hope at the people—only the people can give the world such an artistic personality as the brilliant Karalaev was. Perhaps the new Karalaev is lying in a cradle or has not yet been born.

Today when we are bidding farewell to the great storyteller, I must express my gratitude to the editorial board of the newspaper *Sovetskaya Kirghizia* for reprint-

ing the article I wrote about Karalaev while he was still alive.

* * *

For over three decades Kirghiz scholars have been recording and systematizing the ancient *Manas* epos. Now when you look at the four-volume abbreviated version of *Manas*, you cannot help but be amazed: how could a people that had no written language carry through the centuries to the present so many poetic tales?

The Kirghiz people are among the most ancient in Central Asia. They developed over the centuries an exceptional epic culture. The age-old existence of the nomad people in specific historical conditions (the absence of a written language and fine arts and constant struggle with strong feudal states for their freedom and independence), along with remarkable poetic talent, led to the origin and development of the epic genre. The Kirghiz introduced in their eposes what many other peoples expressed in their descriptions of history, fiction, the theater, picture galleries and sculpture.

At present, of the fifteen so-called "short" Kirghiz eposes that have come down to us in oral form, ten have been published. Each of them has hundreds of thousands of lines of poetry. Each of them reflects a certain historical epoch. Each of them has an original content that reveals multifaceted aspects of life, the destinies of individuals and peoples. *Kodjodjash*, for instance, is an ancient dramatic poem about a man-hunter, about nature worshipping and man's struggle with the forces of nature. *Oldjobai and Kishimdjan* is a lyrical fairy tale, a kind of *Romeo and Juliette* of steppe people. *Kedei-kan* (*Khan of the Poor*) is a social utopia.

But of all the Kirghiz eposes the greatest one is, of course, *Manas*. It is an amazing artistic phenomenon.

Manas is like an ocean; it is longer than any other epos in the world. There are eleven versions, some of which are comprised of over 700,000 poetic lines. In terms of the breadth of life's situations covered in *Manas*, the epos is one of the most outstanding in the world. The main theme is the struggle of the Kirghiz people against foreign enslavers. It celebrates the heroic feats of the legendary Manas who united the divided Kirghiz tribes. However, this is only part of the content, and far from the only story line. Besides grandiose battle and heroic scenes, the most diverse aspects of everyday life are depicted in

detail. The artistic and informative aspects of *Manas* are astounding in their breadth and diversity. Here we find romantic and lyrical, social and ethical themes. Here we find what ancient Kirghiz knew about geography, medicine, architecture, astronomy and military affairs. Here we find a wide range of artistic forms and means—from the most simple satire and humor to the summits of tragedy shaking us by the enormous human suffering. Primordial realism is intertwined with fairy-tale fantasy; symbolism and declarative form with profound psychology; philosophy with belief in magic and miracles; intimate feelings ascend to great passion, while love is subdued by the tribal and patriarchal interests of the feudal collective. *Manas* is the enormous world of the past of the Kirghiz people; it is their grandiose artistic canvas that they have contributed to the panorama of world culture.

The *Manas* epos was passed on orally from generation to generation. It is hard to find a Kirghiz who does not know the story of the hero Manas. We know who the best Manas storytellers were over the last several hundred years. That is why such a phenomenal storyteller as Karalaev was no surprise. This wise seventy-year-old man lived a fine and glorious life. During the Civil War[1] he fought with the Red partisans in Siberia against Kolchak's white guard army. While sitting in his saddle, resting in camp and by the campfire, Karalaev told stories about Manas. He recalled how people who did not know a word of Kirghiz would listen to *Manas* for hours. This shows that Karalaev was a master at storytelling even then. When he returned to Kirghizia Karalaev became well known throughout the republic as a Manas storyteller.

The outstanding expert on eposes around the world, Kazakh writer, Mukhtar Auezov,[2] called Karalaev a "legendary epic storyteller," a "modern Homer," a "rhapsody composer of the 20th century." This is no exaggeration. I doubt if there is anyone in the world who has memorized around a million lines of poetry. It took years and decades to record Karalaev presenting *Manas* and other "shorter" eposes.

When you look at Karalaev, at his expressive face, gestures, expression in his eyes, when you hear this man who has the exceptional gift of artistic transformation, it seems as though he is himself the personification of an epos. His whole demeanor seems marked by past

history. Past events, past suffering, past wisdom, past bitterness, good and evil are expressed all in one. Karalaev's performance is rhythmic, passionate and inspiring. He projects melancholy, sorrow and tears along with courage, determination and heroism. Then again he generates reflection, laughter and weeping.

Once I went with Karalaev to a collective farm in the Chuyskaya Valley. News of his arrival spread like lightning through the village and neighboring villages. People came from all over: they left their fields, livestock and arrived in trucks and tractors. More people wanted to hear Karalaev than the farm's recreation center could hold. So he performed outside. He sat in a chair on a hillock and the audience gathered around him, sitting on the ground, in their trucks and on their horses. Suddenly a storm cloud appeared overhead and torrential rain broke loose. Karalaev did not stop and not one person left. People listened to *Manas* as the rain poured. They were so engrossed by his storytelling. I shall never forget that.

If someone asked me what great Kirghiz people I know the first person I would name would be Sayakbai Karalaev.

It is only natural to take pride in the history and creativity of one's people. But when I think about the *Manas* epos I feel great pride in knowing that *Manas* now belongs to all the Soviet people. Throughout the millennia-long history of the *Manas* epos it was first recorded and published when Soviet government was established. Large excerpts were translated into Russian, thus making it possible to add *Manas* to world culture.

Manas is experiencing a resurrection. It is being brought to life in books, operas and plays, and Kirghiz moviemakers are going to produce a film called *Manas*.

1971

RELENTLESS REALISM

When analyzing the significance of Dostoyevsky in terms of modern culture, his contribution to the past and future, it is impossible not to see the uniqueness of this great and complicated writer. What makes Dostoyevsky unique is that the more time goes by the more his name and his works continue to capture the minds of humankind. This fate is not shared by every great talent by any means. Such phenomena can and should prompt various explanations—after all, Dostoyevsky is Dostoyevsky. I would like to offer my personal opinions on the subject.

Dostoyevsky entered the world of literature over a threshold crossed by many. By that time the world had already known many famous writers, masters of fiction. By that time the graphic means of literature had become exceedingly analytical and concrete. By that time realism had completely asserted itself as the most authentic and comprehensive mode of portrayal of versatile human life in art. By that time the "continents" discovered by the classics were clearly outlined on literary maps.

Dostoyevsky made his discoveries on the "continents" that had already been "discovered." He studied their depths by delving into the human soul and thus introduced something new to the aesthetic culture of a whole epoch. As a great writer Dostoyevsky had a revolutionary impact of the whole course of the world literary process of the 19th-20th centuries. Thanks to Dostoyevsky the artistic thought of subsequent generations was concentrated on an indepth analysis of the individual, his psychology and inner motives in direct relation to reality.

But Dostoyevsky's most valuable and longterm contribution to literature, in my opinion, was his infinite compassion for man choking in the whirlpool of a society that was brutal, cynical and exploitive. Dostoyevsky en-

tered Russian literature gripped with universal anxiety and pain for man beset by social tragedies and the conflicts of his own unbalanced nature. At that terrible time the Russian writer elevated one of the main tasks of humanistic literature—development of man's moral values and compassion without which man could not be whole.

Dostoyevsky believed that compassion was the highest measure of humaneness, the primary quality of the soul characteristic only of homo sapiens. And in today's world with its nuclear weapons, the havoc of the imperialists in Vietnam, in a world torn apart by racial problems and the revelry of violence, the alarm sounded by Dostoyevsky rings incessantly, appealing to humaneness and humanism. This, I believe, is the essence of Dostoyevsky's genius. This, I believe, is the essence of his universal compassion. And this is what explains his eternal and ever growing popularity.

Those in the West who are trying in various ways to interpret the complexities of Dostoyevsky's works and falsify the complexities in pursuit of their own narrow interests, should remember that Dostoyevsky, as a writer, one of the greatest humanists of all times, earned the right to be the conscience of the humiliated and the oppressed by the entire fate of gigantic Russia which suffered the horrors of capitalism in its worst form. Distorting Dostoyevsky in pursuit of selfish goals is, to say the least, blasphemous, no matter who attempts to do this.

With immortal sadness of his immortal brow Dostoyevsky observes the human race like a wise man who has experienced so much and uttered many sacred thoughts. What is important to contemporary people is that Dostoyevsky was merciless to evil and that his relentless and precise analysis also exposes the causes of evil. Hence Dostoyevsky helps us live and fight for our lofty ideals.

Dostoyevsky wrote with the simplicity of a genius about people among people, about the daily and seemingly insignificant cares of his times. But what he saw in that life, what he portrayed through the destinies and characters of his heroes was a revelation of the epoch. A big role in this respect was played by Dostoyevsky's skill, his clinically precise analysis of the psychology of his personages, the motives for their conduct, and his ability to show the dependence of human fates on society. In his portrayal of the humiliated and the insulted, depicting misfortune, calamity and ugliness, Dos-

toyevsky never resorted to vulgarizing sentimentality. Triviality has no place in serious literature, whether it relates to tragedy, heroism, the affirmation of reason and human dignity, the mocking of complacency or intoxication with power. As Dostoyevsky's experience shows us, literature should know the only exact feeling of measure distinguishing genuinely talented and inspired creativity from trivial speculative hack work in literature.

As a writer he is always great, whether we are marking his anniversary or not. He always teaches us to think about the past and the present, about the eternal toil of human existence—the struggle between good and evil.

1971

The living are the ones who experience the sorrow of death...

Some time ago, in a moment of helpless optimism, I wrote to Tvardovsky that I was praying for his recovery. We dreamed of this despite our fearful presentiment.

The poet's foot slipped out of the stirrup of life. His steed trotted off without its rider. And my words became inaudible. Only in my heart, pierced by pain, the echo of the loss does not diminish, just as in the mountains when a giant oak tree struck down by lightning falls from the cliffs. When Alexander Tvardovsky died something inside me departed—the wave pulled part of me away from my continent, part of my nature...

I have only one consolation, that I will never forget him as long as I live, because he was an outstanding writer of our time. I console myself knowing that I was fortunate to have worked with him, that I knew him, loved him, honored the power of his talent like many of my contemporaries, and that others will come along who will be proud, as I am proud of him, trying to overcome the sorrow...

The bitter hour has come to say the final farewell.

He, a peasant boy, came to us from the blessed Russian area of Smolensk at a time when young Soviet literature was just developing. He leaves us a classic poet worthy of the traditions of his great predecessors—Pushkin, Lermontov, Nekrasov, Mayakovsky, Blok and Yesenin... Now they are together, like brothers in spirit, like birds flying ahead of the flock...

The universal significance of Tvardovsky as a writer and humanist is that his works reflect the lives, affairs and thoughts of the people who have built a new, socialist life, the people who defeated fascism and who survived extremely difficult times.

It is impossible to say all that is in my heart in this time of mourning. Our loss is too enormous. But just as

a mountain system has its main mountain ranges, spurs, hills and hillocks, so too is Tvardovsky one of the main mountain ranges of modern Soviet literature.

Many of us have Tvardovsky to thank for our literary careers.

All of us are carrying his casket on our shoulders; all of us in different parts of the country are bowing our heads in memory of the outstanding poet!

It is hard to see the road on which a horse is trotting without its rider. Our vision is clouded by tears...

1971

A WORD ABOUT PUSHKIN

Every year on this same day in February the white snow at the Black River seems to turn crimson red again from the blood spilled there. Once again we pick him up, taking into our arms the mortally wounded man, his head hanging. A century and a half separates us from Pushkin, a far from brief period. If we recall that long before him Europe produced such giant figures as Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, and closer to his times, nearly a contemporary—the romantic Byron whose poetry Alexander Pushkin greatly admired—in that context of names we see absolutely clearly how far away and how elevated is the spiritual origin of Pushkin speaking to us through the years and centuries, through the curtain of the epoch-making changes that have followed one after the other.

Again and again, comparing the past and present, we look to the geniuses of the past who left in art an imprint of the very difficult history of the development of the human spirit. Among them we look first of all to Pushkin, finding in him joy and sorrow and the energy of existence, for Pushkin was not only a martyr but also a herald and a great builder of great Russia. Therein lies the dialectics and phenomenon of Pushkin.

Pushkin was not his country's first genius. Before him there had been Lomonosov, Derzhavin, Karamzin and Griboyedov. But it was Pushkin who was fated to make a revolutionary and qualitatively new leap in the self-expression of the Russian nation, in transforming its language, its literature and art, its political thinking, putting into action intellectual and figurative resources based on a thousand years of development in chronicle and book writing. It was Pushkin who was fated to make a discovery in the history of world literature; after all, the main source of developing the universal values of the soul have always been primarily ethnic principles, the experience of one's own culture, the ex-

perience of one's own folklore.

In this process of worldwide spiritual integration not only the direct contribution of a genius artist is important, but also what comes afterwards, his impact on the whole course of increasing and renewing the intellectual life of society and other peoples entering into cultural contact with him, primarily historically related neighbors. I am more than certain that Pushkin has no equal in the world in terms of his beneficial influence on perfecting the arts and cultures of Russia's neighbors.

All of us and our multiethnic Soviet literature stand on Pushkin's heritage in the same way as mountains that have geological layers as their foundation. If we look at the phenomenon on a global scale, Pushkin's humanistic ideals, aesthetic perfection, realism and the folk flavor of his poetry are essentially a powerful continuation of the art of the Renaissance, only grounded in Russian reality which was already pregnant with the gradually developing Russian revolution. That is how the epochs and cultures come together. That is how a century later the echo of the Renaissance was answered by Pushkin, making the work of the Russian poet timeless, and universally great.

In addition to all this we love Pushkin and embrace him with all our hearts because he is our very own and incomparable Pushkin. There is something else that is even more amazing: the word of Pushkin triumphs, continuing and gaining in strength with each generation, in new languages and dialects, gaining in time and in space new spheres of existence, revealing new depth of meaning and eternal beauty in accordance with our spiritual evolution, each time we turn to him. That is how we are continually discovering Pushkin and Pushkin is discovering us.

This is what makes Pushkin and the Russian people that gave birth to him so unique. The written word has always been revered in Russia and this appreciation has been preserved to the present in our electronic-technological age of cold, rational thinking. This phenomenon is an invaluable example of the high successive aesthetic quality which is so rare and ever dwindling in our time with the onslaught of militant mass culture. Speaking about this with a certain amount of concern, I'd like to stress that the love for books inherited from the Pushkin era, a phenomenon that has become a generally accepted distinguishing Russian feature, can and should be regard-

ed as our country's special merit. After all, nowhere else in the world is fiction published in such enormous print runs and nowhere else are readers as avid as ours. Thanks to Pushkin we have preserved in ourselves the ability to love and admire our native language like the morning sun, we have preserved in ourselves the original purity and depth of emotions. This is no small matter in these times... This wonderful gift of love inherited from Pushkin enables us to appreciate and to love all the languages spoken in our enormous country, seeing in each one of them unique features and rare qualities, because all of them put together are the powerful and eternal instrument of man in comprehending earthly and universal reality and constitute the kind of spiritual unity that helps us believe in international cooperation, and helps us develop internationalist awareness like the nature of reason in the socialist conglomerate of peoples.

We should truly love our own language and respect contiguous languages, helping them flourish without allowing any petty-bourgeois deviations—arrogance and contempt in one case and local ambitiousness in another, both of which undermine fraternal sentiments. We should also reciprocally value this historically given polyphony of languages while fostering a mutual desire to create a shared cultural heritage based on the unity of ideas and the polyphony of originality. All this sets a foundation for further developing our multiethnic Soviet culture, all this is the fruitful result of Pushkin's great poetry and his brilliant foresight through the centuries.

1987

BYELORUSSIAN BROTHER

They were lined up for the march with knapsacks on their backs. And when they started off the road in a long file we ran alongside bidding them farewell. The last goodbyes, the last wishes, the last smiles on the run... The boys who had been born in 1924, the eighteen-year-olds with whom we youngsters only the day before had played as equals, were going off to the front in the winter of 1942.

I remember that later I tied up four horses that I was supposed to take back home in pairs and led them all as though from the battlefield, into the mountains, looking back all the time at the column of men marching off to war.

Of all the young men who trusted me to return their horses and saddles to the village, none ever came home.

Their mothers are also no longer alive, except for one old woman. I feel a twinge every time I see her and the mute pain reflected in her eyes.

"Remember how you brought back the horses?" she asks each time.

"Yes, I remember," I answer and say no more.

When I read the works of Vasil Bykov, when I think about him as a writer, as a person, I cannot help but recall his contemporaries, those who went off on that winter road to secure our country's hard victory, those who would have turned fifty this year like Bykov.

I cannot help but think that fate spared us Vasil Bykov. So that he, having experienced the crucible of war, having survived the bitter and hard times of partisan Byelorussia conveyed to us in postwar literature his innermost, inimitable, mercilessly true and painful message on behalf of all those eighteen-year-old soldiers who shared, perhaps, the most difficult, tragic and heroic fate. For those young men who were just entering adulthood, who had not yet quenched the unending thirst for knowledge, the war from the very outset was

a brutal revelation of the world, a lesson in good and evil in the global, historical developments of the struggle against fascism.

It was important not only to hold back and defeat the enemy, but to be a person of high moral fiber in the battlefields of unparalleled slaughters. It was important not to become dispirited, not to become embittered, not to lose faith in the nature of human kindness. And finally it was important to apprehend the war with a mature intellect on the fronts of personal and common experience as the great moral test of man before his country, in the face of struggle and death.

War and morality, war and the individual—these cardinal problems of the artistic study of the essence of 20th century man—were, I feel, treated seriously and consistently in the finest works of Vasil Bykov. Bykov's hero—the Soviet citizen—not only scored a feat of arms in the war, but, and this is the main thing, demonstrated outstanding qualities as a humanist, an individual in a socialist society. This is the merit, the artistic and civil feature of the creative work of the writer, the thinker, the soldier—Vasil Bykov.

Who does not read Bykov's fine stories? At first sight his stories are like soldiers wearing gray overcoats. They march close together like soldiers. But with what astounding strength, frankness and talent his stories are written in their depictions of people's lives, firm, heartrending to this day, causing us to suffer, reflect and express gratitude...

Yes, give thanks that fate spared us Vasil Bykov, that he lives and writes on behalf of a whole generation, on behalf of those who experienced war as young men and, arms in hand, became strong men in spirit for whom one day of life lasted as long as an age...

Of those Vasil Bykov's contemporaries who asked me to take their horses back home for them, none returned. But I know about them from their Byelorussian brother, writer Vasil Bykov, because we are all one family, we are the Soviet people.

Greetings, Vasil, brother of my brothers whom I served as horse-holder for the last time...

I wish you long life, Vasil, and inexhaustible talent!

1974

PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST

There is a wise ancient saying: if your father dies pray to God that the people who knew him live long. No wonder. The memory of contemporaries prolongs the life of the deceased. It is precisely through recollections that the living attempt to "resist" an irreversible loss.

Recollections bring us pain and also affirm the past.

The eternal memory of Dmitry Dmitrievich Shostakovich will be served mainly by his compositions that are among the most superb of world music in the 20th century.

There is one more reason why it is not necessary to prove Shostakovich's right to be remembered by future generations. Shostakovich had a rare career for an artist: his brilliance was commonly recognized while he was still alive. Furthermore, although his compositions were strictly philosophical they still enjoyed widespread popularity.

Nevertheless, human nature is such that the soul yearns for the recollections of the people who actually knew Dmitry Dmitrievich in his everyday life. This need probably eminates from the desire for a collective portrait of the great composer which can be created by piecing together the reminiscences of his contemporaries.

I first met Dmitry Dmitrievich in the early 1960s in Moscow at the Committee for Lenin and State Prizes. Met is not even the right word because it seemed as though I had always known him. In fact it was unforgivable for a person interested in the arts not to know Shostakovich. I recognized him at once.

At committee meetings I noticed that the numerous eminent members highly respected his opinion. This cultured man—who was no longer young, was fragile and wore thick glasses over gray eyes with large pupils, and had a soft voice—enjoyed invariable prestige. According to some unwritten law, Shostakovich's opinion always dictated a high degree of conscience in discussing

the subject and problems of art. Dmitry Dmitrievich did not have the gift of eloquence at all; his strong point was his irreproachable honesty before a fact (he could say in no uncertain terms that one or another work was unimaginative or opportunistic) and his inner conviction about being right. The great artist's instinct never betrayed him. I do not remember an instance when I felt any doubt about following Shostakovich.

Tremendous sincerity and understanding of beauty together with uncompromising judgements were inherent in Shostakovich as inalienable personality traits. I was proud of him and admired him. This outwardly modest and even shy man who, unlike others, never resorted to high-sounding talk and publicity stunts, was essentially the example of a thinker and an artist who won admiration because of his humanity and, if you will, an obsession with anything truly talented in life and in the arts.

I was personally attracted to Shostakovich also because my own opinions and thoughts always coincided with his. I was even surprised and could almost without mistake predict when we would agree. This apparently was the first reason why we became acquaintances and then friends. We were formally introduced by Alexander Tvardovsky. During a break in the Committee's hallway Tvardovsky called to Shostakovich who was standing nearby:

"Dmitry Dmitrievich, I'd like you to meet Aitmatov whom I've been telling you about."

Shostakovich quickly turned around, smiled and awkwardly extended his dry and thin hand. That was the beginning of a friendship that lasted many years. I liked Dmitry Dmitrievich at once because, despite the considerable difference in our age he took me seriously and treated me as an equal. Oddly enough, Shostakovich, like Tvardovsky and Urusevsky, never used the familiar pronoun "ty" in addressing me, although his age and status gave him every right to. These older friends of mine apparently felt my insurmountable respect for elders and returned it in kind. Incidentally, these three eminent friends of mine were very much alike, mainly because of their ineradicable passion for truth in the arts. The concept of artistic truth, although it has various forms of expression, is a great category and fundamentally unchanging. Perhaps that is why these men felt this was of primary importance and, I think, the main

purpose of their life. I was convinced of this over and over. All of them disliked people who were opportunistic about the objectives of the arts. Tvardovsky was harsher and more blunt in expressing his feelings, but Shostakovich and Urusevsky, who were similar types of people, were as trusting and pure as children. I thought of them as spiritual twins and am sincerely grateful to have had the good fortune to know them.

I can say now that friendship and mutual understanding between people depend mostly on whether they have common interests and convictions. Another aspect is the constant need to share one's innermost thoughts, when you cannot wait to share some serious observation or discovery with a person you respect. This gives you spiritual satisfaction because it is extremely important to hear the opinion of your friend. Sometimes this launches an important conversation about life, about everything accessible to our experience and knowledge, about everything that is painful or lives in our hearts, a conversation that gives food for thought for a long time to come.

Dmitry Dmitrievich and I conversed often. During breaks between meetings and sometimes in these sessions themselves. We sat together and talked quietly on these occasions, as well as in theaters during the presentation of a new play, at film showings, in concerts and at art exhibits. Over a period of twelve years I had the opportunity to talk to Dmitry Dmitrievich, express my thoughts and listen to his. This was probably the most valuable part of our relationship. Now it is hard to recall the details of our discussions about one or another concrete incident. Unfortunately we are not always able to assess the importance of an everyday occurrence, commit to paper at the moment what seems to be an ordinary conversation but what turns out to be extremely significant.

I remember the time we talked about the film *Hamlet* directed by Kozintsev[1]. I was impressed by the movie and especially the music written by Shostakovich. Kozintsev, Smoktunovsky[2] and Shostakovich (Shakespeare is in a category all by himself) "doomed" the movie to inevitable success. The profound content was underlined by the powerful music, the music that was, indeed, in the spirit of Shakespeare, in the spirit of those tragic passions that staggered the Danish prince.

We discussed the nature of the conflict of Shakespea-

rean tragedies. Perhaps it was an overstatement, but I said that historically speaking the time of Shakespearean thought is gone forever for humankind. I also said the same holds true for epos and folk tales. Therefore, no one anywhere, I said, could ever create what Shakespeare did in literature.

I expected Shostakovich to make a joke of it by saying something like: "Aren't you modern writers just trying to justify yourselves?" But Dmitry Dmitrievich was very serious about anything related to the arts; he often agreed with the sensible opinions of others, but in this case he objected:

"I am not certain, maybe it isn't quite so."

Then he stated his opinion. He said that Shakespeare's eternal subjects live on and will continue to live on as long as there are people. And there will always be Hamlets and King Lears. The point, however, is that the passions and problems of such individuals each time manifest themselves according to their epoch. The problem is to distinguish and understand them in the hustle and bustle of everyday life.

"Do you really believe there will be another Shakespeare?" I asked him.

"If not Shakespeare then another genius."

"I doubt it very much."

"I believe it's possible," insisted Shostakovich. He then said something that surprised and delighted me even more. I'll never forget it. He said that in the modern world it is more likely there will be more Shakespeares because humankind has never before achieved such universalization of the spirit and therefore when such a writer appears he will be able to express, like a musician, the whole world in himself..."

The whole world in himself...

We had that conversation in passing. Only later, when I was alone, I understood the significance of what he had said: Shostakovich expected of literature the all-encompassing "musical" portrayal of life.

The whole world in himself...

It may be a tremendously difficult task, but there is no greater dream than that for an artist.

At the same time Shostakovich appreciated concrete literary works that were not particularly philosophical, that were based on reality and written by talented people.

Once I was walking up the stairs behind Dmitry Dmi-

trievich in the Committee for Lenin and State Prizes. There is no elevator in that old building, a former mansion, causing Shostakovich a great deal of trouble in his last years. You can imagine what a man thinks as he slowly walks, putting one painful leg in front of the other. I took him by the arm and we walked up slowly, taking breaks along the way. He was pale, was breathing hard, supported himself with one hand on the railing and the other on me. But through all this he tried to smile heroically. I did not know what to say, what to do to keep him from feeling so weak. As though he knew what I was thinking he said:

"Have you read this amazing story in *Nauka i zhizn*?"

"Yes I have," I said with confidence and smiled because I had guessed right, "Gavriil Troepolsky's *White Bim with a Black Ear*?"

"How did you know which one I meant?" Dmitry Dmitrievich's eyes even lit up. "I read that story with such pleasure; I felt so much pain and joy in my heart..." he commented.

Dmitry Dmitrievich loved and appreciated modern literature. Although his work kept him extremely busy and he was very ill he read everything that came out and was always an active and partial reader.

I have saved two letters he wrote me. These letters are now family mementos that I will pass on to my children. Shostakovich wrote one of the letters after he read *Farewell, Gyulsary*! The second one was about *The White Ship*. Both letters are precious to me, but the second one was sent from Kurgan where he was being treated by the famous Dr. Ilizarov. In it he wrote that his legs were getting stronger and that his hands were improving to the point that soon he would probably be able to play the piano. Whenever I read it over I am touched by the uneven letters that were written with such difficulty, by the infinite humanity, courage and attention of the great composer, my friend and reader. For that letter alone I will be forever grateful to Shostakovich.

Yes, now all we can do is remember, mourn and rejoice over the friendship that we shared.

Here I would like to talk about our family gatherings. Once we happened to be vacationing outside Moscow at the same resort called Barvikha. That was in the winter of 1971. Dmitry Dmitrievich rarely went out for walks and only with the assistance of his wife, Irina

Antonovna. But each time if it was convenient I talked to him. We conversed, sitting on benches next to wooded areas, but mostly inside the facilities—the cafeteria, movie theater and library. And we visited each other's rooms.

It was a beautiful winter with lots of snow. Snow fell every night covering the landscape and creating a peaceful environment for our talks. That winter Shostakovich, who was usually somewhat choleric, was in the mood for concentrating and reflecting. Perhaps he thought about his life, about what he had accomplished and maybe what he had not yet done. After all, no one at the end of his life has ever exhausted all his knowledge and strength. Maybe that is why he continually brought up the same subject, a very important one to me (and not just me, but many others): the ability to give yourself up entirely to your main pursuit, creative work. (This problem continues to be my Number One problem.) He would often criticize me for spending too much time on public affairs and other everyday matters to the detriment of literature. He said that in old age you could never make up for the time lost in your youth because there is a time for everything—what an artist can do in one period he cannot do in another. Life flows on like a river; you cannot enter the same river twice.

Yes, he was absolutely right. He reminded me of that in the "Kurgan" letter. I am trying to make changes in my life. Perhaps I'll succeed. I already understand everything from my own experience.

A year later in the middle of the summer we had another big, noisy and joyful gathering when my wife, sons and I were in Moscow and went to visit the Shostakoviches at their country home in Zhukovka.

It was unforgettable! Dmitry Dmitrievich was in a wonderful mood, although his health was not so good, but it was a period of relative stability. Shostakovich was able to work. The whole house was arranged to facilitate his endeavors; there was even a small home elevator that took him up to the second floor. It was an odd contraption that looked like it was meant just for fun. Dmitry Dmitrievich described with humor how he used his personal elevator. He even let my younger son Askar ride up and down on it.

We also had an enjoyable time when we ate together. I was relieved to see that Shostakovich's spirit was still strong. I was also happy that when his wife Irina Anto-

novna had called us in Frunze that spring to ask us to get some "Issyk Kul Root", a strong Kirghiz medicinal herb, for Dmitry Dmitrievich I was able to obtain it rather quickly. Some friends and relatives in Talas had gone to the mountains to pick the herb and a week later brought us back a large amount. Dmitry Dmitrievich did not know that he was being given this medicinal herbs. If he did know he did not let on. I was hoping very much that our "Issyk Kul Root" was helping Shostakovich. I even persuaded myself to think that his good mood was due to the mountain herb. However I realized that the herb was only used in very serious cases.

Nevertheless, that day we did not talk about any illnesses, as though we had forgotten about them. After dinner we went to Dmitry Dmitrievich's study to listen to his favorite records...

The most memorable time I had with Shostakovich was a year and a half before his death. On one of my trips he called me at the Hotel Moskva. He invited me to his home that evening and said that before supper he would be listening to a new composition of his for the first time—the Fourteenth Quartet. If I wanted to be there for that I should come at exactly 7:00 p.m. I was naturally eager. But late in the afternoon, because I had to finish reading the galley proofs for an article in the daily *Izvestia*, I saw that I would unavoidably be ten or fifteen minutes late. When I called to tell him of my delay and to apologize, Irina Antonovna answered the phone. She reassured me. She said the concert would begin at exactly 7:00 p.m., that it would be all right if I came a bit later, and that the concert would most likely be repeated. At 7:10 p.m. I was standing at the door of their apartment. I could hear the music playing. Irina Antonovna let me in. When I said hello out loud she put her finger to her lips and, walking quietly down the hallway, she led me into the living room where the quartet was playing.

Shostakovich was sitting at the table, his back to the door, and Kara Karaev[3] was next to him. In front of them, in the middle of the room, there were four musicians.

I walked without making any noise to keep from distracting the composers and sat down on the couch next to the door. No one even looked back. The musicians were totally engrossed in their work. Shostakovich and Kara Karaev, leaning forward, were listening intent-

ly. Gradually I also became immersed in the music. I cannot say it was easy. On the contrary, I had to push all other thoughts out of my mind in order to get on the same wavelength as Shostakovich. I did not succeed completely. But Dmitry Dmitrievich listened to the music with the same intensity as though he was trying to distinguish in the music something he had not yet said or found. Looking at his expression from the side he seemed to me different, unfamiliar and even hard and closed. I looked with confusion and fear at his bent back and the hard profile of his tense face. My foreboding was correct. When the musicians finished, Dmitry Dmitrievich did not change his eagle-like position right away. Kara Karaev, on the other hand, immediately expressed his sincere admiration and pleasure and, trying to control himself and maintain an even tone, he said literally the following:

"Dmitry Dmitrievich, it is a work of genius!" and heartily thanked the musicians.

Shostakovich, however, while nodding his head in gratitude, remained cold. He was a different person. Some merciless exactingness toward himself and others was awakened in him. He also thanked the musicians and then began to criticize the playing in detail. Kara Karaev even had to soften his remarks. God only knows the musicians played very well, not only with heart and soul, but with all their being they gave themselves up to music they were playing. But the composer wanted still more of the musicians, more mastery, more precision, more inspiration. He had been working with that quartet for thirty odd years. The composers and musicians discussed and argued for a long time, agreeing and disagreeing with each other. It was a conversation of music makers.

Then they decided to play the Fourteenth Quartet again. I listened and could not help but think: "Now how do you like that sweet, kind and shy Shostakovich! How vigorous and relentless he is when it comes to his work!"

That was what I thought about Shostakovich that evening—with pride, respect and admiration.

That is how I want to remember him for the rest of my life!

1976

HIS FIELD IS ENORMOUS

Words. Verbal elements. Words tell us about ourselves and all that can be understood in the entire world. Man cannot exist without words, not can words exist without man. Words and language belong equally to everyone and to a people, a nation. But how is a superb master of words—a poet—born? That is a hard one to answer. "Inspiration," someone may say, "God-given talent!" But is that all? These are broad concepts and therefore the origin of poetic thinking, like musical thinking, sometimes seems just as mysterious as the birth of a comet in the unfathomed depths of the galaxy. Out of what particles, in what conditions can words turned into verse become a special phrase that is a real and profound image in the same way that firewood can ignite small sparks that grow into big flames? Indeed, just how does this happen?

I thought about this once again when I was re-reading David Kugultinov's poetry. Since I know a lot about the life and work of this poet, I see once again that a master of the written word is the product of his people. A poet must belong to his people, unlike an abstract artist, although many of them are truly great. The orientation of their mastery is another matter. An artist of the word, however, a poet such as Kugultinov, develops among his people, in the "galaxy" of its spiritual and moral experience, among its sorrows and joys, in its past and present history, and among its most treasured dreams. This is because a poet must possess a combination of the past and present, the hopes, passions, thoughts and feelings of many in his all-embracing self.

Furthermore, a modern folk poet, in this case Kugultinov, is born twice among his people who have given the artist his language, traditions, dreams and aspirations. The artist, having developed, carries the name of his people as he emerges from his very local poetry into world literature. Then the poet can and has the right to

speak out on his own behalf and that of his contemporaries.

How powerless man is on earth!
High mountain ranges bar his path,
Deep seas his boat and tackle swallow
And lightning strikes him with hot wrath.
Poor wretch, he knows not what tomorrow
Shall offer with a mocking laugh.
How powerless man is on earth!
How powerful on earth are men!
In mountain gorges rock they rend,
They draw rich treasure from the ocean
Into whose depths brave men descend,
Their spaceships rival stars in motion,
Their minds the future apprehend...
*How powerful on earth are men!**

The eternal philosophy of being and the vital dialectical approach in comprehending the meaning of life are the modern artistic thought processes that Kugultinov learned from the cradle of his ancient people.

I am saying this for a good reason. A poet is like a tree—we see his trunk, branches and green leaves, but its roots are concealed from sight in the deep and powerful layers of the people's present and past history. This small ethnic group, having suffered brutality and hardships, managed to survive, to preserve the memory of its ancient artistic culture. Under the Soviet government the Kalmyk people have revived in a new socio-historical environment. This alone was responsible for the emergence among the Kalmyks of one of the greatest Soviet poets, our contemporary, David Kugultinov.

As a master of verse and as a thinker Kugultinov is interesting, profound and quite modern. The strong and epic character of his verses are highly intellectual, with psychological depth; at the same time they reveal simplicity and a lyrical soul. Kugultinov thinks in the global terms of 20th century man, achieving in his poetry the "stereophonic" portrayal of man in the wide world and the whole world in each man.

The strongest and most vivid aspects of Kugultinov's poetry are his reflections and emotions marked by anxieties turning into hopes and hopes turning into doubts,

*Translated by Peter Tempest.—*Ed.*

the joys, bitterness and wisdom of contemporary man.

Kugultinov's major accomplishment, in my opinion, is a poem he wrote in recent years—*The Revolt of Reason*. It has created quite a stir. It is about the recent war in Vietnam, about the danger to world peace and the catastrophic consequences of a nuclear war. So much has been written and said about this, but Kugultinov has his own approach.

While listening intently to the eternal sounds of Mozart's Requiem we can see ourselves in the home of an ordinary American who is in mourning over his son killed in Vietnam. We truly feel for the parents in their grief. It is not hard to see that the deceased and thousands of other young Americans like him are the victims of militarism. We are moved, however, not only by the poet's compassion... When you read the poem at first you can barely hear the alarm of a lone bell ringing somewhere in the distance. Gradually the ringing becomes louder, filling the entire Universe with its infinite space and time, from prehistoric days when man was just developing until the present with its terrible atrocities. Fact, fantasy, fairy tale, parable, epos, political advocacy—all this is powerfully combined in Kugultinov's poetry. He is a mature and superb artist harboring both great pain and great hope.

The Revolt of Reason is a sophisticated and complex poem containing a multifaceted, unfettered and wide-ranging flow of thought and imagery. I would like to single out in this poem a special section called a fairy tale about the "Iron Bird." It is a vivid fresco from folklore that is skillfully woven into the poem's general panorama. Lush and allegorical, as only folklore can be, profound in its message, it deals not only with an unusual topic, but mainly with serious world problems that are of eternal concern to the reason and conscience of man—how to stand up to evil, violence and despotism that cause war and disaster.

Kugultinov is an undoubtedly major and unusual master of the written word. He has been a prolific writer for a long time, enriching Soviet literature with his work which clearly reflects the pulse of a poet with a civic conscience who is aware of his responsibility for everything that happens in the modern world.

When I think about Kugultinov as an outstanding representative of Kalmyk literature, I feel privileged that he and I have been fortunate to live and work in the era

of Soviet government, promoting to some degree the intellectual culture of our peoples. After all, when our ancestors, the Kirghiz and Kalmyk peoples, lived side by side in the Altai Mountains and in Turkestan, they often crossed swords and waged wars against each other. All this has fallen into oblivion; it is past history. The time came for unity, cooperation and unparalleled brotherhood. The time came for cultural cooperation and the cross fertilization of cultures.

The wheat has not yet eared,
Its modest charm would fire no heart,
It holds no secret, it would seem,
But of the vernal gifts it is that part,
I think, the people most need.
And I admire it this early morning,
As if with fervent, happy yearning,
In coauthorship with water and earth,
I also worked to give it birth.
I have raised it up with inspiration,
Have helped the sun to warm the seed,
And watch with envious sensation
How work will now proceed...

With pleasure I recite these lines of the poet so capable of "coauthorship with water and earth." Herein lies the strength of his soul. "And watch with envious sensation how work will now proceed," the work of David Kugultinov. His field is enormous.

1975

THE CRANES ARE FLYING...

The exhibition hall in the Artists' Union of the USSR is featuring the paintings and graphics of Sergei Urusevsky.

It is hard to believe that such a fine master, wonderful person and dear friend has not been among us for more than a year. How fast time flies.

Most people knew Urusevsky as the cameraman of many excellent movies. Incidentally, he was never just a technician following the director's orders. No matter what movies he filmed they were all marked by his unique artistic style. I certainly do not want to minimize the role of the directors and superb actors in the movies he filmed—*The Forty-First* and *The Cranes are Flying*. Yet I cannot imagine these films without Urusevsky's inspired camera work. Using the language of plasticity, he was able to capture what even the word could not. Such subtleties exist in nature, in relationships between people, in the creations of art which we sense intuitively rather than rationally, which elude us when we attempt to convey their significance in precise terms, in the concrete definition of words.

Urusevsky's vision through his camera possessed a mysterious inner power with enormous impact. After *The Unsent Letter* I saw probably a thousand films, many of which, even the good ones, I have forgotten. Scenes from this film by Urusevsky, however, are still vivid in my mind today, as if I were seeing them on the screen.

We became acquainted over the telephone. One day I got a call from Moscow. It was Urusevsky—we had never met or talked to each other before. He said, "I've just read *Farewell, Gyulsary*!" He really liked the book, had been thinking about it all night, and looked up my home phone number to tell me that. I must admit it was a nice surprise. Soon afterwards I received a letter from Urusevsky in which he offered to do a film based on

Farewell, Gyulsary! That is how our friendship began; it was unfortunately brief but intense and warm.

I often visited him in his home together with my sons, with the whole family. I will always remember that small one-room apartment filled almost entirely with stacks of pictures. Until then I did not know that Urusevsky was originally an artist, that he switched from painting to the movies. This discovery made me admire his modesty (he never talked about his paintings) and his energy. I thought, now that's quite a man! How much creative spirit he has if, after working full time in the film industry, he still manages to paint, and so magnificently!

I am certain that no matter where his paintings are shown they will stand out regardless of what other paintings are nearby. They are striking for the artist's technique, his love for life, his ability to enjoy and appreciate life, comprehend and contemplate its most complex aspects. It is the art of a mature person who has seen a lot in life and yet has not lost his pure and child-like sensitivity. He would often paint the same people, interiors and landscapes again and again. But each time they came out differently, as though he was seeing them for the first time. That was typical of his approach to the world.

His paintings were always focused on what was most important. Whatever he painted—a person, still life, landscape—he always wanted to bring out the essence of his subject. His paintings of women are marvelous. He often did portraits of his wife Bella—they emanate great warmth, capture various nuances of mood and reflect his feelings for her.

I believe that in any kind of art the most difficult job is to portray a person. No matter what landscapes an artist or a writer portrays, no matter what beauties of nature or enormity of industrial construction projects they conjure up to stagger our imagination, if they do not show man in all that, in an inspiring way, their efforts are fruitless. This is precisely the main subject and meaning of Urusevsky's art.

Originality, nonconformism and uniqueness—these words applied to Urusevsky do not at all explain the mystery of his creativity. To me the word "music" describes it better. Of course it is not the kind of music written in scores, but the music of Urusevsky's brush and camera are indisputable.

He truly loved the written word as well. He avidly

read everything new and interesting in Soviet literature. I can only name one other person who took such a touching and concerned interest in whatever I wrote—Dmitry Shostakovich. Both of these people shared a deep sense of responsibility for Soviet culture in general. They were not only sensitive artists but patriots. They could not be silent or indifferent to developments in our culture, for instance, literature; they were concerned about its future and rejoiced in its accomplishments.

During preparations for shooting the film *Adieu, Gyulsary*, based on *Farewell, Gyulsary!*, Urusevsky and I went to a high plateau, Susamyr, to choose a site. I did not have to go, of course; as usual I was pressed for time and there was no particular reason for my going. But I went anyway and I am grateful that I did. Those beautiful mountains and the invigorating fresh air inspired thoughts and conversations about the meaning of life, history, art and everything else that matters; our talks were a source of enormous pleasure.

We went to the Susamyr with our families. I took my sons. The pictures we still have of that trip are magnificent, like genuine black and white paintings. You can actually feel the artist's style. These pictures are unlike any of the hundreds of photographs we have at home. I am certain that my children will treasure them always.

Some mountain shepherds invited us to eat with them. As is customary in such cases there was a samovar, fermented mare's milk and friendly conversation. When we were about to leave one of our hosts commented: "He's probably a very close friend of yours, isn't he?" These plain people were able to appreciate Urusevsky's inner beauty.

The Susamyr is the highest point surrounded by snow-capped mountains. And although I have been there so many times, before that trip and since then, I will always associate that area with Urusevsky. I will remember it as a special and unforgettable event in my life, although I do not think I realized it at the time. This happens often: we do not have time to stop and think about ourselves and fully appreciate the people around us.

A year later I went back to those same parts where Urusevsky was shooting. He was a different person, totally engrossed in his work. Like a soldier who had seen many wars, he had once again given himself up to another battle. Nothing was as important to him as his art at that moment. He was able to live for his art.

Urusevsky was particularly sensitive about shooting *Adieu, Gyulsary*. He was captivated by the book and wanted to do a film that would reach people's hearts.

Some people were apprehensive about a fine cameraman like Urusevsky suddenly directing a movie. I could not agree. It was quite natural for him to go into directing. Perhaps he even waited too long to make the transition; he should have done it earlier.

Urusevsky always felt young at heart, and I think my deference to him as an older person even annoyed him somewhat. Once I called him an *aksakal*. "I couldn't be that old?" he laughed. I tried to explain to him that I did not think of him as an old man, that I always regarded him as a young, wonderful and open-hearted person, but that by calling him an "aksakal" I was honoring him as a great artist. "Oh, you're just being nice to me," quipped Urusevsky, brushing off my compliment.

I think back on our Susamyr trip and can visualize Urusevsky, lively and with bright eyes that were taking in the beauty of those mountains for the first time. It was nighttime and the sky was full of stars, huge and bright, as though they had just been created. It was like in a dream. Suddenly out of nowhere a comet appeared in the sky, leaving behind it a raging trail. We stood there dumbfounded, unable to tear our eyes away from that sight...

I will always remember Urusevsky as one of the most wonderful people I have ever known.

1976

THE LAND AND BIRD OF INSPIRATION

I have long felt that in our professional consciousness there is some kind of unavoidable passion to announce without the slightest doubt any culture's novelty that enchanted us with a revelation of sorts that begins, as it were, from scratch.

Hence the appearance in literary criticism of numerous different "isms," of newly invented terms that people use to define impressively and even explain the nature and essence of these things. Among them are "magic realism," "mythological realism," "cosmic vision," and so on and so forth.

In my opinion any inspiration emanates in the final analysis from the artist's land, from the reality, history and personal histories transformed by the powerful passion of the artist who is creating an image of the world and toward this end pulls into the magnetic field of art any element necessary, whether folklore, myths, ancient poetry and the latest scientific discoveries, that is, if they come naturally to the artist and are not something that is simply in vogue or imitative. After all, doesn't the superb Latin American prose of today have its precursor which is not only folklore?

Our own writers have drawn on this sphere of unusual and synthetical perceptions of the world—Gogol, Odoyevsky,[1] Bulgakov... It is no wonder that Gabriel Garcia Marquez proudly claims his teacher was Tolstoy. Tolstoy in turn considered his predecessors the ancient Greeks.

What does this mean? That the origin and development of "world literature," although the term arose much later, has been under way since time immemorial. All of us, whether we realize it or not, are related.

At the same time each major artist belongs to a particular era, a particular environment of development, a unique history which is this very bird of inspiration.

Sometimes it really seems as though fate, like a compu-

ter, is capable of calculating error-free an unknown quantity out of numerous and scattered analogues.

Just before World War I a young romantic man of peasant stock began teaching in a small Ukrainian town. Probably there were many such romantic types from the lower classes starting their teaching careers in the cities and towns of prewar Europe. But this particular man, who was as pure as the driven snow, indefatigable and impetuous from his abundant emotions and a desire to strike out boldly but without a clear idea about where and how to direct his energy for self-expression, was destined to a great future at the dawn of an amusing art that no one yet took seriously—cinematography. Moviemaking, which appeared at the beginning of the century as miraculous moving pictures, was badly in need of completely devoted apostles and pioneers who were to pave the way through the hustle and bustle to the summits of the most compelling mass form of entertainment. Fate chose Dovzhenko, having unmistakenly guessed at his remarkable personality reinforced by his volcanic creative potential that was rooted in the Ukrainian epos which had bred many a great artist, and by the revolutionary force of the masses. The fact that this was exactly so, that they were two genetic sources of one phenomenon will be completely confirmed by time and life.

That fate turned out to be the 1917 Revolution which fostered the inspiration of a whole host of pioneers of a new culture, the future fathers of Soviet multiethnic literature and art.

Dovzhenko's fiery personality was similar to Mayakovsky's, and like the great poet, he developed as an artist and individual under the impact of the socialist revolution. In this respect Mayakovsky and Dovzhenko were equal supports of the same bridge in terms of their noble spirit, deep passions and revolutionary fervor, like the resultant forces of a single movement. Here, as in physics, the sum of the resultant forces determines the force of velocity. And both of them, called by the revolution, were consumed by the superrapid velocity just as blazing meteorites are consumed in the star-studded skies...

But the time has come to take a deep breath and analyze Dovzhenko's accomplishments as they become increasingly legendary.

We are now marking Alexander Dovzhenko's 90th

birth anniversary. Time marches on and everything changes while the summits of art cannot be annulled, cannot be superceded, they stay the same.

In science, however every new result is surpassed tomorrow by other breakthroughs; this is how science inexorably progresses.

In is impossible to become another Tolstoy by sidestepping Tolstoy. Perhaps some of us attempt to do this; there's no harm in trying. If you can reach such heights, go ahead and try. But no one can ever outdo Tolstoy, just as no one can ever surpass Pushkin, Dostoyevsky or Gorky...

They are all autonomous continents, unique worlds of the spirit.

The same thing is true in moviemaking, although this art has its fair share of transiency, but I am talking about major films, not the run of the mill kind. Even in this field we can find long-term worlds, withstanding the test of time, reflecting our recent past and present, our social and spiritual experience, the features and image of our people who dared take the most fundamental and bold step in human history—the building of socialism.

Dovzhenko is one of those gifted minds and artists who used their vast talent to tell the undying and unflagging truth about our life.

Dovzhenko's significance goes beyond the framework of Soviet moviemaking, although his subjects were strictly Soviet or more precisely Ukrainian, or only what he created himself...

What he accomplished was like an iceberg that is much bigger than it appears at first sight. That is always the multifaceted essence of a truly great master: he talks about a rock but actually about a mountain; he talks about a village but actually about a planet; he talks about a day but actually about a whole era.

But to express the substance of things in this way is possible only in the reactor of revolutionary portrayals of image and thought. Dovzhenko was just such a thinker-reactor to whom we are grateful for his compelling epic film portrayals of those great tumultuous times. Dovzhenko's work, along with other major Soviet moviemakers, served as the highest artistic measure of the people's intellectual level against the background of worldwide developments.

That was the strength of his thought and images bor-

rowed from real life. Far from all of one's contemporaries can recognize the nature of such major portrayals and aspirations of an artist to deepen the cosmos of the dialectics in portraying life. This is due to the strong inertia of the environment which in all times has gravitated toward simplification and sugar-sweet works. Also it is not always possible, even in epic works, to deal fully with all the problems of existence, quench the infinite thirst for the assertion of justice and appreciation of beauty. After all, some problems that are dealt with in depth usher up other ones because life goes on and it always seems as though so much has been left unsaid. We cannot help but feel that somewhere over the horizon a new vista has appeared, one that is even more fascinating or alarming but only now recognized; therefore it is necessary to talk about it, to feel it through and through, whether it is a human tragedy or comedy. Perhaps that is why Dovzhenko criticized himself saying: "Obviously some bit of cognition of wisdom whispers to us—how little you have accomplished, how much you have to learn and think about and know, not only feel, in order to achieve total clarity in your portrayal."

However, despite Dovzhenko's demanding nature, not all his plans, not all his screenplays were realized. This is truly regrettable, even now after so many years have passed. It is time for us to think about these aspects of life, too, because there is a time for everything, a time to live and a time to go: our goal in facilitating and guiding the arts is to extend an artist's useful creative time within the time he or she is allotted..

The way literature and film combined influenced Dovzhenko is a topic for a whole separate discussion. Every new cinematographer, whether a writer, director or actor, I believe, should strive to understand and appreciate Dovzhenko's style and vision as a writer and director. Dovzhenko's unique literature between two art forms is significant. Perhaps this marriage of literature and film is one of the global trends in the development of modern world cinematography which is increasingly moving toward the art of thought, merger, synthesis with literature, with the problems it raises and the life situations it depicts. And this increasingly dominant tendency toward an alliance with the philosophical literature of the mature Dovzhenko is fundamentally counter to cheap Hollywood movies.

When we talk about Dovzhenko we must also note

that he vividly reflected his ethnic culture, ethnic poetry and ethnic mentality. While he was a truly Ukrainian artist the social content of his creativity advocated everything Soviet, everything that united and consolidated us as the world's first multiethnic socialist community. He was and remains an internationalist. He belongs to everyone and everything that beautifies our peoples in their unique and dignified community.

According to my observations, including in other countries, the very concept of ethnic cultures today as such, most vividly manifested in the arts and literature of the 20th century, is linked primarily with Soviet ethnic cultures.

This is recognized by everyone—friends and adversaries. In this respect the artistic intelligentsia of the world looks to us as a phenomenon of universal significance. Who in the past could have thought of the existence of professional Kazakh, Avar or even Balkar literature? Who today could deny Auezov, Gamzatov and Kuliev their rightful place in world literature?

The most urgent task for scholars and critics is, in my opinion, to analyze for an international readership the experience of our theatrical, musical and visual arts which reflect our unique ethnic cultures.

I mention this because we often take for granted what we have at home, what we are accustomed to; we do not always appreciate that the inner connection and mutual influence of ethnic cultures in our country is a unique historical process, is a significant accomplishment and that it is our contribution to the universal treasury of cultural wealth.

The bird of inspiration elevates the artist's spirit only when he is standing firmly on his land—grounded in reality. Perhaps this is why there is a Kirghiz saying: "An egg lying on the ground will send a bird flying into the sky, but this bird will eventually return to the land."

1984

III. THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE

WINDS WASHING THE LAND

In just a few days the Fifth Conference of African and Asian Writers will convene in the Soviet Union, in Alma Ata.[1] I must admit that this is meaningful to me as a Soviet writer in the Turkic language.

Alma Ata is a major modern Asian city that has grown up before our very eyes. In my opinion this prospering city symbolizes the young and rapidly developing forces of modern Eastern cultures.

Naturally on the eve of such an event each of us participants in the Association of African and Asian Writers is thinking about the purpose of the organization, our role in it and the tasks we face.

One cannot help but realize that the association's founding came after the defeat of fascism in World War II. It is extremely important to understand this fact because the defeat of fascism was a turning point in the history of all peoples, the beginning of the collapse of the capitalist colonial system. Generations will come and go, but historians will always trace many major developments back to the victory over humankind's most sinister enemy, a victory of planetary importance which was largely made possible by the forces of socialism.

As far as social structure and the development of productive forces is concerned, we live in extremely complex times. On the one hand, the human race has reached the point when the eternal fear of "How to make a living" is increasingly conceding its place to philosophical problems: "What is the meaning of life and what should we do with our lives, what is the goal and essence of being?" On the other hand, we share the earth with millions of people whose every thought, I am ashamed to admit, is on how to earn their daily bread. Colonialism is to blame for this situation among a large part of the population of Asia, Africa, Oceania and Latin America. The list of its crimes is long and still incomplete.

The biggest evil of colonialism is the enormous moral and potential damage to humankind's resources. As a result we see the "twisted nature" of civilization, the disproportion in the formation of nations, in the foundation of states and in the development of the personality. And here we meet up with a phenomenon that cannot be written off as someone else's problem because we are all affected.

Today the numerous peoples of two huge continents—Asia and Africa—must choose solutions for not only political and social problems but also ways to develop the more complex aspects of their nations' lives—their cultures. Political independence urgently necessitates various forms of economic and cultural life corresponding to new conditions, otherwise independence is useless. That explains the need for a broad Afro-Asian cultural front that can stand up to imperialism and neocolonialism.

The colonial system left the countries of Asia and Africa a terrible legacy. The traditional links and common roots of ancient civilizations were flagrantly disrupted by the policy of colonial divisions and new ties have not developed. Therefore unified action was vitally important around the cardinal issues of fighting for a new life and a new culture in Asia and Africa. One such solidarity organization was formed by African and Asian writers and was joined by Soviet writers who play an active role. This is our internationalist commitment, our spiritual solidarity in the realm of literary progress with all progressive forces in the modern world.

The national liberation struggle in Asia and Africa has become one of the most powerful social shifts in the latter half of the 20th century. Never before in history has there been such a powerful awakening of so many peoples all at once. Literature is the first to feel historical changes and naturally writers in Asia and Africa have felt more acutely than anyone else the need to consolidate their actions geared to accomplish general anti-imperialist tasks. Writers in these countries must soberly evaluate their cultural heritage in comparison with the modern accomplishments of humankind and determine what is a viable part of the past and what is an anachronism; what facilitates progress and what curbs it; what keeps the newly independent nations from more rapidly taking their place in the complex system of world relationships; what promotes unity and a new humani-

tarian orientation and what isolates peoples, thus playing into the hands of neocolonialism which has not by any means relinquished its positions.

No literature can develop fully today without contacts. And a discussion of any literature is incomplete without regarding it as part of world culture.

I agree completely with the Bengalese critic, Sarwar Murshid who has pointed out that any literature today must decide whether to regard itself as an integral part of world literature or be "great" only at home. The temptation of "homespun grandeur" leads to complacency and eventually dogmatism.

That is why every literature aspiring to progress should apply the maximum criteria for self-assessment. This is the only way to overcome isolation and parochialism; world literature is the only gauge of professional mastery.

Emotionally I can understand the reasons for the prejudices some Asian and African intellectuals have against Eurocentrism, European mentality and European civilization which they associate with colonial rule and disregard for their national dignity. However the most progressive African and Asian intellectuals have been striving for a long time to draw on European experience to enrich their own ethnic cultures, regarding it as something that belongs to everyone who lives on earth.

Isn't literature in the Soviet Union a good example? The fundamental principle of its development is constant mutual influence and mutual enrichment both inside the country and on a worldwide scale. We believe that all accomplishments of human genius belong to us all and that by taking what we can from this treasury we also facilitate the development of each literature and culture in our own country and have reason to believe that we contribute to the general fund of intellectual culture.

At the same time we should not forget that each literature has its own specific tasks.

In conversations with my colleagues from Asia and Africa I often hear this statement: "The 20th century is the century of nationalism." This stirs controversy instantly. It is extremely important to have a clear understanding of this complex and broad concept, nationalism.

If what is meant is any doctrine of national exclusiveness, any theory of superiority of one people over others, or a conception of narrow selfish national-state interests, then neither of them is acceptable to me be-

cause they are terribly reactionary. They lead to complacency, arrogance and, as a result, to intellectual wilderness.

If what is meant is unique ethnic and cultural features resulting from the experience and age-old efforts of entire peoples, then there are no grounds for claiming that the desire to preserve and promote languages and cultures goes against progress. Furthermore, such claims are shortsighted. The loss of even one color from the palette of universal culture is irreparable. It is obvious why these issues are so painfully acute in Asia and Africa—for these peoples the threat of ethnocide is only now receding into the past.

The problems that we discuss in our meetings and in our magazine *Lotos*[2] indicate that our association has already reached maturity. This is also because the single-purpose struggle for political freedom has now been replaced by a complex period of profound social and cultural changes in all newly independent countries in Asia and Africa, changes requiring analysis through literature and the arts. On the agenda are artistic issues dictated by the need to develop literature in the spirit of the gigantic transformations under way, literature that is realistic.

I believe that one of the main problems of world literature has always been and continues to be realism, or rather the level of understanding realism in literature. What do I mean by this?

Realism lives and develops in a complicated relationship with other methods. I am mainly concerned right now with the relationship between realism and romanticism. Why?

Realism in literature is an indicator of its maturity. Both photographic realism that prevents the artist from portraying something in its entirety and pseudoromanticism that tears literature away from the land are equally infantile. The method of realism enables an artist to see a trend before it becomes a phenomenon and to express his stance. A realist artist cannot avoid seeing any aspect of life, otherwise he cannot provide a truthful portrayal of reality, whether it is a positive or a negative phenomenon, whether it is desirable or not. It is a major failing when an artist does not see life in its totality or consciously limits his view of the world. He is to blame, no matter what his motives.

Romanticism is sentimental and declarative—it is an

idealized approach to reality, a limited vision of it that is often, to be sure, dictated by a desire to beautify reality. There is generally nothing wrong with this. The problem arises when such a vision of the world is presented as the truth. The danger of beautiful and "naive" romanticism is still serious when it comes to young literatures and the arts in developing countries because this kind of artistic thinking is typical of earlier stages of creativity. I believe the most urgent task of new literature is to accelerate the transition to genuine realism, drawing on the experience of more mature literature.

I am firmly convinced of the need to correctly understand the value of literary works. No topic, no matter how politically important, can justify poor and mediocre, in other words, untalented writing. And on the contrary, no innovative form or skillful style and imagery can make a literary work spiritual and artistic if it is uninspired, lacks political content and depth of thought. We have to repeat this because in our daily practice we resort to one or another kind of extremism in evaluating literary facts. An exacting attitude to one's work is a quality that has never hindered anyone.

Along with general creative tasks I would like to single out the most important mission of Afro-Asian literature at one stage—the psychological and moral unfettering of man from the aftereffects of colonialism.

In order to liberate man from his age-old inferiority complex, awaken the man in him, make the spirit of comradeship and internationalism come natural to him, it is necessary to profoundly analyze the consequences of colonialism which did colossal damage to the human spirit. One can only speculate on the efforts it will take to completely eradicate all this from people's minds and hearts.

The artist must socially and philosophically analyze the consequences of colonialism as a terrible experience of "selfenslavement" suffered by humankind. Only then can we speak out firmly in our literature about the absurdity and illogicality of all conceptions of ethnic, state or racial exclusiveness.

It is in our general interests to promote genuine internationalism in all spheres of life, in all manifestations of the human spirit and conduct. In modern literature and the arts there is no goal more urgent, more cardinal, more humane than to strengthen in every person faith in oneself and faith in life. To accomplish this it is neces-

sary to free man from the degrading survivals of colonialism—mainly in his psychology, mentality, in how he regards himself and the world around him.

The role of the modern writer is new in its nature and its social significance. In Soviet literature we are constantly stressing this circumstance, understanding it as the partisanship and ethnicity of art. This is not only a political conviction but one of the main concrete feautures of our literature.

Now during the scientific and technological revolution, when the intense specialization of disciplines in the natural and social sciences helps us see the world in greater detail rather than in its totality, only literature and the arts are capable of providing man with an integral perception without which it is impossible to form convictions that reveal the profound meaning of phenomena and human nature. Therefore writers today have a much greater responsibility than their predecessors.

Moral progress is inconceivable without the ability to question oneself, without the ability to seek answers to these questions, answers that reflect the utmost integrity. In the quest for maximum criteria we look to all of humankind's spiritual accomplishments. But this does not mean we should blindly borrow or imitate. It means we must creatively enrich our age-old ethnic traditions with universal values that correspond to our ideas of humanism and understanding of happiness and human freedom. The search is undertaken individually but the finds belong to everyone.

Writers in Asia and Africa whose countries are undergoing unprecedented changes are now developing new moral standards. The foundations of these standards cannot be the outdated and no longer viable criteria of traditional systems or the amorality of an "affluent society." At a time when a consumer society is destroying moral standards, replacing them with the motto—"anything goes," progressive literature aspires to promote genuine humanistic morality. This is the main goal of literature and the arts. This is what gives meaning to our lives and to our work...

1973

THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE TO THE SPIRIT OF HELSINKI

We all understand that not by chance our paths have come together in Sofia.[1] There are too many serious reasons in the world why this happened. We have gathered together in a tense if not alarming time when the irreconcilable struggle between the human spirit and its own contradictions has become global and extremely acute. We have come here to share the most cherished thoughts we have when we are alone and contemplating life, human beings and the fate of modern society. Never before has the world been so complex, never before has man experienced such astounding changes, never before has man faced such prospects for development and such a menace to his very existence.

All this is inevitably reflected in culture, in our artistic experience, in the nature of our thoughts. After all, when we have written a book there is still more that lives within us which awaits its form and its figurative expression. I'd like to talk about something that's been on my mind a long time. Allow me to express my deep respect for all those present.

The people here are representatives of modern literature, those who are creating it day after day, breathing into it their lives and passions. Time will show what we are capable of, having boldly started out on this difficult and inevitable search for the truth and the beauty of the spirit; it will be clear in time what was discovered in this pursuit toward an understanding of reality, a task many generations of great writers have taken up before us; time will tell what we have added to the eternal tale of man about man. Then we will also see what we have not accomplished, what was not in our power. In short, time is the judge of all things.

But there are some things that we cannot leave to the impassive judge of history, things that must be talked about now and must be evaluated. This is the time if we want to be sure that we did everything we could while

we were alive to promote peace, the all-important cause. The image-bearing word of the writer who urges the preservation of life on earth cannot be left until later—it requires immediate action. That is the situation today if we want to be completely true to our calling and duty as writers.

We write for people, for our contemporaries, using the media of literature to cultivate those qualities and those traits of character that most fully correspond to the overall experience of all times—to the principal human ideals. This has always been and will always be the eternal purpose of literature. I realize that this approach to the goals of literature that reflects the complicated development of the soul and intellect, contradictory and socially conditioned as they are, may at first sight seem somewhat simplistic. But the eternal and universal ideals are precisely what remain the fundamental problem of literature and the arts. The functions of literature may change over and over again, but not its primary purpose—reflection of the essence of human nature. That is why it is perhaps more important than ever before that literature help us recognize what another person is feeling, teach each of us to care about others as we do ourselves, force us to see that others, just as much as we do, love life, fear death, suffer and fight for their right to a place under the sun.

Just because the primary purpose of literature remains the same does not mean, however, that its forms are unchanging. On the contrary, the development of our understanding of man, of society, the world in general and our place in it absolutely require the development of literature, of realist literature, because realism among all forms of relfecting reality is the summit of our artistic thinking. The realism of modern world literature has reached such heights that it differs from realist writings of the past in the same way that Lobachevsky's geometry differs from Euclid's. As never before literature occupies the main place in man's spiritual life. This alone empowers us with enormous responsibility.

Let us not argue now about what is transient and what is eternal in literature, or about which ideological categories reflecting one or another economic practice and political system facilitate most completely the artistic cognition of reality and which ones act as forces of inertia that impede us. This is a special question. Every thinking person cannot help but know that the phenome-

non of eternity is the immortal beauty of ideas and the spirit concealed in the subject of art.

As for the struggle of ideas, we all know that it is eternal and inevitable. That is the dialectics and the substance of social being; it is the driving force behind social progress.

I would like to suggest talking about what we all share as individuals and writers in the latter half of the 20th century, what has presented us with special creative tasks and so sharply at that. Perhaps this is what compels us even more to listen to each other.

For a number of historical reasons we probably differ a lot from earlier writers. I would hope that those who follow us will also be different. What am I getting at? That we were all led here by an urgent need before which we are united and equally responsible—never before in history has there been such a general threat to life and culture as there is today. And never before has there been such a menace to nature, to the living functions of our environment. All of us know that very well.

It is precisely for this reason that we writers from various countries, writers with various traditions, cultures, political and aesthetic convictions, have come here together.

But first I would like to analyze what makes us different from other eras and what inevitably unites us not only in the face of a general menace but also in terms of the very essence of contemporary life.

Naturally we are united first and foremost by the realization of a common responsibility for the fate of human culture and for the moral climate on our planet. We can say boldly that the paths are being chosen now for the development of the human spirit and our responsibility in this respect is especially great because we cannot postpone the solution of these issues for the future; the future itself depends largely on us and what we can do today.

The question is—can reason, culture and art at a time when opposing polar forces are irreconcilable, when different ideologies are engaged in a sharp clash, when an all-encompassing scientific and technological revolution is under way to recreate the nature of man so that the eternally great and immortal passions remain constantly prevalent: creation, the extension and preservation of the human race, man's understanding of himself and his purpose in life. Only in this case, if we manage to with-

stand the destructive forces of inhumaneness and amorality, to preserve and elevate the spirit of humanism, can man truly be called a thinking creature. This is the only way; there can be no other.

History has placed before us the extremely harsh condition of choice: "either, or."

I would be the last one to try and persuade anyone here that it is necessary to work for peace—that is an axiom. Is there any alternative? Need we doubt that each one of us is doing and will do everything possible to preserve life on earth?! The concrete form of that struggle today is in the actual implementation of the decisions passed in Helsinki to make the international detente irreversible. Again, as was said above, there is no alternative. There is no alternative to the spirit of Helsinki today. So far the collective reason of humankind has not invented anything else. Again we face the harsh choice of "either, or" because peace and humaneness are essentially profoundly interrelated. Isn't this one of the most important goals of a writer—to see life through the prism of Helsinki?!

I am not a historical fatalist and I realize that if humankind has up until now been able to ward off the threat of a nuclear catastrophe because of tireless efforts and primarily, I believe I express the general opinion, those of the peace-loving actions of the Soviet Union we cannot rest on our laurels and feel less anxiety. It is necessary to do far more to curb and defuse the very social evil that fosters violence, brutality and misanthropy.

There is one factor that forces us to regard this as a direct threat. We do not separate ourselves from critical world problems; every negative phenomenon that the West faces today we regard as a common calamity shared by all humankind. The scientific and technological revolution has enabled people around the planet to communicate with each other instantly through the mass media and has physically brought us together through rapid means of transportation. This has made us much more dependent on one another than ever before. We are all in the same boat today, overboard is cosmic infinity.

But this same scientific and technological progress with its amazing and universal tangible accomplishments that have entered into the life of literally every person has also facilitated, along with a changing lifestyle, a dispassionate and at times merciless rationalism in assessing the indi-

vidual, peoples and the uniqueness of cultures. The so-called factor of useful activity transferred from technology into the spiritual and moral sphere has become a justification of what must never be justified—violence, the humiliation and degradation of man. According to the factor of useful activity, which has become a kind of gauge or stereotype, no one is irreplaceable. But from the human point of view each of us is invaluable and unique. Who could take Romeo's place for Juliette, who can replace a son for his mother, who can replace soldiers killed in war?

Only a stereotype can be replaced easily and simply. The audiovisual and other technical means of its mass transformation foster indifference and condition people to believe that this is all perfectly normal. This is what is so terrible and destructive about standardizing the spirit, about making any genre a cultural mass consumer good. We did not realize at first that technological progress does not equal moral progress.

Judging a person by how useful he is automatically leads to disregard for his individuality and emotional life and makes our efforts useless in promoting an individual's moral perfection. As a result, man is presumed to be a consumer machine and culture is regarded only in terms of its consumer value. Hence there's one step toward romanticizing and poeticizing violence and brutality. It is distressing to state that humankind is threatened by the monstrous industry of the cult of force and violence which has become so widespread in the West. When a society has nothing with which to fill the vacuum of spiritual emptiness, the virus of fascism finds its way into people's minds.

The most dangerous thing we can do is underestimate the potential danger of getting accustomed to the idea that violence in the world is inevitable. And it is even more horrible to confuse brutality with heroism. I would like to stress that the aversion we have toward cultural consumerism often keeps us from fully realizing the sinister relationship between the propaganda of mindlessness and the actual threat of war. This should especially worry us writers and cultural figures.

Hence I believe the primary aim of literature should be to promote a more healthy moral climate in the world, something which is as important today as concern for the natural environment without which normal and healthy life cannot exist.

This task presents us with a common problem that I would call the problem of developing contemporary thinking. Contemporaries are not only people who live physically in the same age but, most importantly, people who share a common way of thinking. It is primarily the ability to think at the level of advanced and progressive ideas, to think globally. This is essentially genuine internationalism and respect for the uniqueness of cultures, languages and the artistic heritage of all peoples. Finally, it is the ability to think ahead, distinguishing the trends of tomorrow that are developing today. Comprehension of our times in precisely this way is extremely important if it is to become man's second nature. This will become one of the reliable guarantees of world peace.

This is the aim primarily of literature. I do not want to ascribe to literature the role of the Messiah. Political figures work for peace in their own way; they have the decisive role to play. But literature has its particular ways of portraying life and influencing the human soul. Naturally we writers link our efforts, our creativity and our artistic vision with progressive political aspirations geared to the most noble goal in history whose foundation is peaceful coexistence, the idea of preserving what is most precious on earth—human life and culture.

I cannot help but emphasize (with pride and with hope) that the experience of the 20th century shows us that of all the accomplishments of world thought the Lenin's principles of peaceful coexistence are, without exaggeration, the height of reason and humanism. Having this belief and hope we appeal to the entire world.

Friends and comrades, we live in the ecology of rapid changes. The people of India in antiquity used to say that the only thing constant is change. This has never been as true as it is today. We are changing the world and the world is changing us.

When the structure of being is becoming increasingly complex it is not enough for literature to be merely a mirror flatly reflecting all that is around it; it must be a multifaceted prism that honestly recreates in its stereospheres the depths of life and human destinies. This is the focus of our lives and our work.

1977

MEETING ABOVE THE PLANET EARTH*

It was after 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon Eastern Standard Time in New York. Americans were watching their televisions. A Soviet cosmonaut shook hands with an American astronaut.[1] *The popular TV commentator Walter Cronkite would later say on the news that the handshake could mark the beginning of a new era in humankind's advance on the unexplored.*

At the same time Kurt Vonnegut and Chinghiz Aitmatov met and watched the program together. Sitting in front of a TV monitor they exchanged their first impressions of that outstanding experiment in outer space.

Aitmatov: We are already used to unbelievable developments in the exploration of outer space. We're old hands now. Hardly anything can astound us earthlings these days. Nevertheless I think that what we are seeing on TV is an amazing event in the history of our generation.

I just finished writing a story about a time when few individuals were contemplating the exploration of other worlds; that was during World War II. People were farming with horse-drawn ploughs. Today these same people are witnessing a major accomplishment of rocket technology, yet such a short time has passed.

My story is somewhat biographical; I attempted to describe what I had seen and felt. After my younger son Askar read my manuscript he asked in amazement, "Weren't there any tractors in those days?" I told him there were, but not enough because of the war. Now the scientific and technological revolution has catapulted us from one era to another, as it were. What role does the tractor play today in the general scheme of things? Here we are watching TV and not only seeing what is going on in outer space but as individuals we are seeking common

*Retranslated from the Russian.—*Ed.*

ground and peaceful cooperation for the two great countries we represent.

I am moved by all this. We appear to be sitting here calmly watching the tenth or twentieth program from outer space. But this makes you think about the titanic power of human reason. However I am sitting and thinking—touch wood—may it always be this way; may there never be hostilities there in outer space. May there never be hostilities on earth either.

Vonnegut: What we're seeing is fantastic. Incidentally, in my opinion, the simple fact that we are sitting here having this friendly conversation is really important. After all, we understand each other very well. This was true even before we met. It wasn't hard for me to understand Aitmatov because he is a writer like myself and we have common interests, common concerns and professional secrets. You say that two different countries are meeting right now in outer space. But we have met before as well. You know our literature well and we know yours to a certain extent. And we met on the Elbe. It was an extremely important meeting at the end of the war on the bloody battlefields of Europe. I was liberated by the Red Army. When our armies met and shook hands it was not a formal ceremony—all around us reigned death and destruction. War is a terrible calamity; it should not be romanticized. But it was the first rendezvous of our peoples who were linked by a common goal. And now we are witnessing a new one, and what a rendezvous!

As far as I know our peoples have never hated each other. If you stop any American on the street and ask him whether he hates the Russians he'll be surprised: why should he hate the Russians?

Of course we do have our maniacs: every family has its black sheep.

Aitmatov: For thirty years now we have managed to avoid another world war. Still there are many things that divide us for many reasons—historical, political and social. No one claims that we should hang on to these contradictions. The meaning of life is that we should always seek solutions to problems. We are doing this in many fields. You and I, for instance, are doing this in literature, in culture, when we try to bring people intellectually closer together, when we try to promote cultural exchanges which can and should help promote noble thinking that will serve the world's best interests.

We are also seeing another way of seeking solutions—

the cosmonauts and astronauts working together as members of one family, serving a wonderful common cause.

Isn't this meeting an important symbol and promising beginning? Shouldn't this open up new prospects for us? Shouldn't we regard it as an attempt to find some kind of general example of action in the face of life's contradictions? After all, what we are seeing is not only a technological accomplishment. I regard this as a very important aspect of ethical relations between our two countries. You remember what relations were like in the postwar years... Now we have cut through the window into outer space together. Through this space window we are seeing each other as if in a totally different way, in another dimension.

Vonnegut: I think that both our countries felt that they would possess more energy in the face of the enemy...

Aitmatov: I believe, if we intend to seek strength only in confrontation then we will always have to keep our fists up like a boxer. Perhaps this makes us ever ready to rebuff an attack, but that's no way to live. We should think about the fact that millions of people became involved in one way or another in such confrontation and suffer from it. We only live once. The day comes when a person becomes physically and spiritually mature and has to think things over for himself, go out into the world and assert himself, fulfill his purpose in life. Surely he shouldn't have to feel like a boxer always ready to beat someone or defend himself.

Vonnegut: Our civilization should be mature enough to say: yes, we have enough knowledge to get us to Venus. We'll do that when the time comes. There's no hurry. Venus will not disappear. Let's be wise, and not be impatient children who want to beat another group of children. Let's work toward our goal gradually and jointly.

I really admire the Soviet Union for its rapid reconstruction after World War II, for its wonderful technology and for being a fine example of scientific boldness. In American football sometimes a player gets killed. The American scholar Norbert Wiener once wrote that Americans tend to look at problems that arise as a game that has to be won. But if this is so then this cocky attitude may be due to the fact that our country has never had a strong opponent.

We are changing gradually. Cooperation in outer space

is a good example. But I would like to cite a different example from another area. Today in our country we no longer idolize a man who is physically strong and can beat up his enemy. If someone offends my wife I don't have to knock the guy out. And if a man is overwhelmed by feeling there's nothing wrong with it if he sheds a tear. But when I was a boy in Indianapolis my friends tought me how to act tough in the streeets. That was the way things were in America in those days. Now we don't feel we have to look threatening to others. I think that our leaders are reckoning with such changes in the national character. I don't want to be superior to the Soviet Union in any way. Perhaps the next accomplishment will be the discovery of a cancer cure. I don't care where this happens—in the Soviet Union or the United States.

Of course there is a field where we should be tough, and that's business. If I had to talk business to Soviet representatives I would get myself thoroughly prepared. While we sit here and talk we love each other. But we would have to be less charming when it comes to discussing how much money will be transferred from one party to another and on what terms.

Aitmatov: I would like to suggest gathering together our ideas or they will scatter like a flock of sheep all over the mountains. I would like to get back to the linkup in outer space and what is happening this very moment before the eyes of the whole world. We can look at this from various points of view—historical, social and everyday life—but just the same it is an extremely important event that is being covered in all the papers, on all the radio stations and in other mass media. Every person will try to understand it and evaluate it in his own way in order to figure out what it portends.

As for sports, I'm not sure that it can play a decisive role in international relations. I know people who have a mania for athletic victories and if their favorite team loses and comes in second they think the world has come to an end. I agree that sports and athletic spirit is in the nature of man—we have a desire to always want to do better, an urge to overcome something, to achieve some goals, to outdistance, to catch up. Of course sports gets people all worked up and makes life more exciting for them. But in this case I am concerned about something more important, because there are too many problems in the world and too many contradictions that are much broader than athletic concepts.

Things aren't calm on earth; the earth is beset by social, national and other conflicts and passions. History is made in tireless struggle. And it is out of this chaos that something new is developing and elevating humankind in its own eyes and showing us what we are capable of. This is a precedent that we will refer to in the future. We will say there was a moment, after all, like a flash of revelation when powerful forces of the human spirit sought each other out not for the sake of destruction but unity. I hope very much that this event will have an impact on many aspects of life, including the development of culture, the thinking of humankind, our perception of various aspects of social life both in individual and global terms. As far as I can judge the mood of the Soviet people, this is what interests us more than anything else. We all know that spacecraft can also be used for military purposes. But we don't want that to happen. Apparently some positive changes are occurring in the collective human mind. I would like to believe this.

Yesterday we returned from San Francisco. When people on the streets heard us speaking Russian they turned around and some of them came up to us, said hello and put their thumbs up as if to say: great things are happening up there in outer space. We understood each other without words. But there were other people we met who questioned whether it was all worth the money spent.

I don't want to condemn or accuse people who care only about the money spent. They want money to represent something concrete, whether it be lipstick, a car, a skyscraper or something else. When they have nothing to show for their money they feel it has gone down the drain.

It stands to reason that exploring outer space requires a great deal of expenditures. This would concern anybody. I noticed this the very first day I arrived in Washington when Kaltai Mukhamejanov and I watched the premier of our play *The Ascension to Mt. Fuji* at Arena Stage. The audience responded when one of the characters, agronomist Dosbergen, argued against the need for space exploration. During the heated discussion Dosbergen burst out saying: "You give me rain when I need it and make it stop when I don't. Otherwise, what the hell do I need outer space for! I can't farm there!" Voices murmured throughout the theater. But the audience also responded sympathetically when his wife Almagul, a

teacher, pointed out that in order to control the weather it was necessary to understand what was happening around the earth. At the Sovremennik theater in Moscow I remember seeing very similar audience reactions.

Of course the money spent on space research could also be used for something else. But I think that society has some inevitable super tasks that, if left unaccomplished, progress will be impossible.

Yes, no matter what we say or think, the inevitable is happening—science and technology are developing, humankind is advancing. What are the results? Our most important job is to ensure that this process goes in the right direction, that it really promotes progress and happiness.

1975

NOT COEXISTING MEANS NOT EXISTING

Conversation with Commentator Vitaly Kobysh

Kobysh: One year has ended and another just began. For even the most prosaic people this is always an emotional turning point when something has ended that can never be repeated and something unknown awaits ahead.

Aitmatov: Yes, perhaps this sounds like the usual way New Year dialogues begin, but it is true that this is when we really feel how time flies and that we should somehow stop for a moment and think about things. So how about trying to do some reviewing and talk about our shared concerns?

Kobysh: I am certain that what is on the minds of many people is the future of our world.

Aitmatov: This is the first thing we think of and, unfortunately, it is a problem we cannot ignore. I honestly envy people who lived in the "good old" pre-nuclear days. People then had more peace of mind. On New Year's eve they simply wished themselves and their loved ones a Happy New Year. It was a family occasion. Today when people think about themselves they have to think about so many other things too. That's the 20th century for you. It so happens that all the main problems in the world are tied up in one tight knot, so tight that sometimes I think (pardon me for the comparison) that the current generation is actually up against the wall. There are problems that it is unrealistic to even attempt to solve or even analyze without reckoning with the interests of others (naturally while observing equal security).

Kobysh: I agree with you. People who seemed yesterday to hold opposite opinions may become partners in negotiations today under the pressure of objective developments. Naturally, what we are talking about is disarmament, the most global of problems which will inevitably involve everyone: could this be the year when the most terrible thing happens, a war that will not spare anyone, that will leave no one on the sidelines. In this respect perhaps last year was a time like never before

when people's eyes were finally opened.

Aitmatov: Do you mean the unusually large peace movement across Western Europe? Of course, this is a powerful action of history. But would you say that the masses have pressured the forces of confrontation to bring down their banners?

Kobysh: No I would not. But you will agree that it is already impossible to ignore the enormous peace movement. You may remember that last November President Reagan made a speech with statements that surpised many, even himself, it seems. He talked about peace, about reducing weapons, about negotiations. I cannot speak for everyone—I'll never really understand philistines—but sober-minded thinkers realized right away that this was not simply a ploy, even the most sophisticated, that something more serious is behind it. Apparently militant rhetoric in today's circumstances far from always has the desired results.

Aitmatov: Yes, I suppose so. I think that in any case this is very important: I'm talking about public recognition of the priority of peace. This means we need to gain whatever we can from this in the interests of worldwide detente.

I am not a politician but in my opinion this means that the ice has been broken to some extent: after all, until this the American philistine applauded appeals for stockpiling weapons. I admit that as a writer I have always been disgusted by this way of getting applause because any kind of social demagogy, I believe, is ambiguous and even dangerous. In the final analysis it breeds fascism. So I am wondering if perhaps there, on the other side of the ocean, sober minds will keep these emotions from reaching a high pitch.

Kobysh: What you say is quite timely. American analysts, the more serious and honest ones, are coming to the alarming conclusion that the United States is creeping toward a dangerous point beyond which we can see the signs of pre-fascist sentiments American style.

Aitmatov: If that is the case it is bad enough. Still I hope that in this great country there are reasonable and influential people who understand what this could lead to.

Kobysh: Unfortunately, Americans have some bitter experience in this regard. McCarthyism was pre-fascism.

Aitmatov: But McCarthyism as the forerunner of fascism was nevertheless suppressed and condemned not only by the outside world but by Americans themselves.

Kobysh: I think it was only suppressed, not destroyed. Those are two different things. What is happening in the United States today—the fervor with which the American philistine is ready to take on the rest of the world if this world does not fit its image of how people should conduct their lives—is much more dangerous than McCarthyism. Incidentally, many McCarthyite attitudes are evident today: blatant chauvinism, spy mania and witchhunting.

Aitmatov: So primitive philistines are also those who are leading America into a chasm and are stronger than those minds reflecting common sense and the most progressive trends in America?

Kobysh: You are getting into an extremely complex and, unfortunately, still rather unclear problem. I do not want to get into semantics, but the question arises: just what and who is a philistine?

Aitmatov: Yes, you are right. It is not a simple matter. I think of a philistine as mainly someone who cares only about himself. His own welfare is the ultimate goal and in any socio-environmental situation he will fight ferociously to achieve this end. A philistine does not have his own opinion when it comes to historical categories; he always follows all the stereotyped thinking imposed on him.

Kobysh: That's right. The responsibility of political leaders and the mass media for the philistine's attitudes and actions is all the more so. And political leaders are not the only ones responsible. I think that even more responsibility rests with those who, along with the politicians, shape people's psychology and culture, give them intellectual and ideological food which in our age of consumerism has become for a large part of humankind more important than daily bread.

Aitmatov: I am very glad that you have so clearly defined the problem. I must confess that I do not always meet understanding in this issue that concerns me so much. Some people are conceited and arrogant enough to think that literature and other arts are services intended for their entertainment. They sincerely think that depending on their mood and self-conceit they can either pat your back or stamp their feet.

Kobysh: I see what you mean, only things are not as simple as you think. There are people who realize full well how literature and the arts influence people, only they use them for their class-motivated egotistical and sometimes even militaristic and imperialistic goals.

Aitmatov: This raises the question of the ideological orientation of literature and the arts, and the trends in the literary process in one or another society. Since we live in divided worlds, so to say, that even oppose one another, it is necessary to find a general conception of artistic creativity for all progressive cultural figures.

Kobysh: Do you think that is possible?

Aitmatov: I am certain it is possible and even necessary. Why? Because all modern civilization is facing a general crisis. That great menace that looms over humankind can be described best by the Old Testament: "... the waters are come in unto my soul..." The "waters" of warning today are getting higher and higher, like that flood, rising up to our necks. In these circumstances we should find a common language for people regardless of what worlds they belong to. That language today reflects the ideas of humanism.

Kobysh: That is all well and good. But when missiles are aimed at you and when a crusade is declared against socialist Poland, isn't talk about pure humanism abstract? I think that this talk should be concrete since humanism is a class category.

Aitmatov: I agree. In and of itself the concept of "humanism" may seem abstract. But if you think about it, only by turning the ideas of humanism into reality can we save the world. There is no other way. So far humankind has not come up with anything more universal that could unite the whole human race.

Kobysh: But that does not at all mean that the inevitability of the class struggle, revolutionary processes and the national liberation movement loses its urgency and becomes secondary in the face of a world menace.

Aitmatov: Of course, all the problems of class, social and national liberation struggle are and will apparently continue for a long time to be primary factors in the life of modern humankind. When we talk about peace we certainly do not mean conserving the situation when some are "basking" in luxury (as was the case with Trujillo in the Dominican Republic who had toilets made of pure gold) while others are dying of hunger, disease and social deprivation. Furthermore, we can assume that when today's wounds—flagrant social inequities—are healed, new problems will arise at a new level of social development.

Kobysh: That's possible. But I think that today some people are trying to reconcile the irreconcilable and

against the background of the bells ringing the alarm of general destruction are attempting to stifle, if not completely remove from the agenda, issues related to class and national liberation struggles. The excuse is that we do not have time for these problems when we are headed for apocalypse. They have had intentions in switching the emphasis when it comes to these problems and concepts.

Aitmatov: I do not disagree with you. But these issues have never before been so interrelated in such a complex way.

Kobysh: Yes, that is so. International tensions are growing, as you know, for one, because of developments in El Salvador. Many people in the world believe that Washington's present policy with regard to this country and the region in general could lead to another seat of war. Does this mean that the long-suffering people of El Salvador should give up their efforts to change their own lives? And what about other regions where countries are ruled by archaic regimes propped up by American militarism? Surely no one has the right to demand that these peoples sacrifice their own vital interests for the sake of, as it were, general calm?

Aitmatov: No one could disagree with that, but there is one other aspect to this extremely complex matter: the danger of provocations that could be a detonator of a general holocaust. In these circumstances the ideas of humanism take on concrete class meaning and become a kind of compass that humankind can use to escape from the seas of storms and crises into the oceans of normal life. Then every man and woman on earth will live as long as he or she was meant to and in a way that homo sapiens deserves.

Kobysh: Now let's get back to our original discussion about the role and importance of cultural figures in our troubled times. What can they accomplish and what do we want from them? I would like to say one thing—they can do much and this certainly obligates them.

Aitmatov: Here I cannot help avoiding mere verbiage. The question arises: what is the noblest purpose of culture, especially literature? That purpose exists regardless of whether writers live in different countries and in opposing social systems. This purpose is that we must put all our creative efforts into promoting Reason which frees people of all forms and types of biases dividing peoples and putting them against one another.

Kobysh: Reason... Isn't there too much calculating reason today? What about kindness? What about sympathy and compassion for a loved one?

Aitmatov: Does one cancel out the other? My idea of the meaning of life is that Reason tops everything else, that it is inseparable from kindness and invariably counters evil. That is why I believe that the noblest purpose of literature is to cultivate humanism by fostering reason. This is what should unite us writers into world literature. Yes, we adhere to socialist realism, but this does not exclude the universality of our artistic thought. On the contrary, this is what it presupposes. If in the old days Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and Chekhov expressed ideas that concerned everyone, today there are such dramatic universal problems that we have not yet begun to deal with, that are awaiting artistic treatment. It does not matter where, in what part of the world an artist is born, for him to be able to feel the drama of the 20th century and describe it in such a way that it will be a revelation to everyone, no matter how far away people live from one another and no matter what else divides them.

Kobysh: Are you saying that we can expect the appearance of other Tolstoys, Dostoyevskys and Chekhovs?

Aitmatov: That's not quite right. Perhaps they will appear and perhaps, now don't be frightened, they are already here.

Kobysh: I'm not frightened, but I do not see any signs of this, although I do know that there are major writers today.

Aitmatov: Okay, let's be specific. Remember how Gabriel Garcia Marquez burst into our lives from distant Colombia? And what a deep impact he had on our artistic awareness? But he writes about life that is unbelievably far away from us, that at first sight bears no relation to our reality. I think that we also have writers in our country who, unfortunately, have not yet been fully recognized in other countries. These writers have messages of universal significance too. Time will tell.

Kobysh: You cannot complain of not being recognized outside this country, can you? Your books are read all over the world.

Aitmatov: For one thing my books aren't the only ones people read, and anyway that is not the point. What people mostly read today are detective stories. But our Soviet literature offers the modern reader what is not available in any other literature. We have our own ideas

and identity, and have made our contribution into the modern literary process.

Kobysh: I suppose you are right. Many of our writers show how the written word can shed understanding on the times and the epoch, no matter what biases, mutual misunderstanding and differences act as obstacles. I would really like for as many people as possible to read good translations of our best writings.

Aitmatov: You have touched on a truly sacred subject. Today, as never before, it is important for people to learn to understand each other better. Then much of what separates and alienates people would disappear from our lives. The way to better understanding is to translate, publish and read more of each other's books.

Kobysh: Here I would like to stress another important circumstance. Talk in the West about the inevitability of apocalypse, the total annihilation of the human race, is not simply the outcome of counting nuclear warheads, but has actually become rather fashionable. What do you think about that?

Aitmatov: I believe we are talking about something that is more than fashionable. There are writers in the West who insist that wars are unavoidable. They claim that the two opposing systems will never find a common language, that it is human nature to be aggressive, thus making wars not only inevitable but even necessary because of certain factors, for example, the population increase. War is seen by them as a hygienic purge of sorts. In fact they describe this in almost masochistic terms. They condition people to the idea that wars are inevitable, intimidate, make them feel helpless and insignificant in the face of this menace. I believe that such literature is a crime against present and future generations.

Kobysh: Yes, this is just as dangerous as deploying American Pershing-2 and cruise missiles in Western Europe. It is the same kind of violence and intrusion, only against human souls. Not only they are attempting to gain military superiority, but they are also trying to suppress people's will to live, the instinct to carry on the human race.

Aitmatov: It is disgusting. Our salvation lies in the fact that the desire for life prevails in man and is something that no one or nothing is capable of destroying.

Kobysh: In the final analysis life's protective systems are stronger than any weapons system, even the most lethal. In all times, from the invention of the bow and

arrow to the era of gun powder, new types of weapons have always caused general horror. Nevertheless people have survived and rid themselves of the horror. Of course today's nuclear weapons are no comparison because they can annihilate all living things.

Aitmatov: That is the whole point. But on the other side where these weapons are being brandished people also realise very well that to use them would be an act of suicide. Anyway it is not the weapon itself that is so frightening as the state of human relations. This is the main problem. In this respect we inhabitants of the Planet Earth should be vigilant, self-controlled and reasonable. The time has come in history when we may make a mistake only once. I am certain that this is understood everywhere. The question then arises: what to do now? We have to rid ourselves of the oppression of prejudices and try to rise above our differences, demonstrate wisdom and come to an agreement on how to survive under the one roof of our planet instead of thinking of how many times over we can destroy humankind.

Kobysh: And so, not only our joint coexistence on earth is inevitable but the ways and means of this coexistence—good will miltiplied by a sincere and realistic dialogue. Let us title our dialogue this way—not coexisting means not existing. There is no other alternative.

Aitmatov: I do not know whether it will be possible this year to have a successful dialogue, a wonderful gift to everyone. We live in hope that the weapons will not destroy people but that people will destroy the weapons, and that every new day will be met not as a menace but as a joy.

Kobysh: So let us wish all the people in our country and around the world happiness in the New Year. And let us also wish them kindness and wisdom, without which happiness is impossible.

1982

TEARING DOWN THE SMOKESCREEN OF BIASES

Conversation on WBAI Radio in New York*

Host: Good morning. My name is John Fisker. Together with me in the studio is Chinghiz Aitmatov. He is here as a guest of honor at the United Nations and a representative of the Soviet public at the UN Special Committee Against Apartheid. Today he'll be talking about a whole number of issues related to apartheid and he'll tell us about the Soviet Union.

Mr. Aitmatov will speak Russian and we'll get a simultaneous translation into English.

And so, Mr. Aitmatov, could you tell us something about what's going on at the Special Session?

Aitmatov: I'll try, but first I would like to say hello to listeners. I don't think it's very often that you hear Soviet people talking on the air, especially when relations between our countries have worsened noticeably. I am happy to have this opportunity. Indeed, as a guest of honor I took part in the UN Special Committee Against Apartheid. The UN invited a number of well-known people in literature and the arts and cultural figures from various countries. I was honored to be among them.

Host: Were any cultural figures represented from the United States?

Aitmatov: Unfortunately, not.

Host: When I was preparing for this conversation I noted that you are a member of the USSR Supreme Soviet and a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the Soviet of Nationalities of the USSR Supreme Soviet. Is it unusual in the Soviet Union for a cultural figure, in this case a writer, to be an official?

Aitmatov: It's quite ordinary. We couldn't imagine our parliament not having representatives of these professions. I could name many writers, artists, sculptors, composers and movie directors who are in parliament. There are many leading scholars who are also members of Soviet parliament.

*Retranslated from the Russian.—*Ed.*

Host: In this respect, of course, there is a striking contrast between the Soviet Union and United States.

Aitmatov: Yes, I think the difference is great. A senator or congressman in the United States, as far as I know, is usually a professional politician. For us this work is in addition to our regular profession. An artist, for instance, continues to paint, but also spends some time as a member of parliament.

Host: When you start writing again will you write something about apartheid?

Aitmatov: I would like to explain why my current visit is related to apartheid issues. I hope that listeners will understand. It would seem that we live far away from Africa, from other parts of the world where racial discrimination and apartheid exist. One would think that those problems shouldn't bother us. But the essence of our policies, our ideology, our culture, is that we cannot be indifferent to what is happening in the world, to the historical and primordial injustice of some people against others. This doesn't mean that we are prepared to invade another country to do away with this injustice physically. But we believe it is our sacred duty to talk about these problems, think about them, expose evil, do what we can so that everybody knows about it, and to ensure widespread condemnation.

Host: Is this the main goal of the Special Session? In other words, what end result is it moving toward?

Aitmatov: I believe our work will be effective. It'll be a longterm haul. I think that besides political, economic and legal issues, the question is how deep is people's understanding of the real meaning of the problem. How alarmed is modern society by the practice of racism. If we do not talk about this, if we do not agitate people against racial discrimination, this disgraceful phenomenon will continue to persist for a long time. We must do what we can so that people come eventually to the same conclusion: this situation is impermissible. The time has come in the development of humankind and in history when this phenomenon has to be uprooted. Racism hinders normal life on earth, racial discrimination causes suffering for many, many millions of people. How can one be indifferent to this problem? In our press and in our public affairs we react to this sharply.

Host: How well informed are Soviet people about the situation in South Africa? In the United States we regularly hear about what is happening in the region.

Most Americans are well informed about developments there. From a moral point of view what is happening there is despicable. Is this subject discussed widely in the Soviet Union?

Aitmatov: We not only discuss it widely, but are very concerned. Demonstrators are shot for demanding their right to equality. Twenty-two years ago events took place in the townships of Sharperville in the suburbs of Johannesburg, and later Soweto that we can never forget. Even seven-year-old children were shot. Isn't that the most brutal violence? We believe this should not only be condemned but should be fought every day in moral and political struggle, at least for the sake of our being people who are worthy of the 20th century.

We live well and don't have such problems ourselves. But is this what matters? Can we be calm when others are suffering? We are all on the same planet. This is especially clear now at the end of the 20th century. If a people or even one person is in trouble, no one should be indifferent. What humankind must do, in my opinion, is develop some kind of planetary mentality. I suppose it will take us a long time to get to that; it'll take a great deal of historical development. The time will come, however, when everyone will be capable of thinking of others the same way as themselves and feel their needs as keenly as their own. This conception should also exist between nations.

Host: You said that relations between the United States and Soviet Union have worsened. At the same time US relations with the apartheid regime in South Africa have become rather warm. Recently it was announced, in particular, that we plan to sell South Africa aircraft and other technology that it could use for military purposes. Does that fact have any relation to the Special Session?

Aitmatov: I don't know whether it has any direct relation to the Special Session. After all, 1982 was designated the International Year of Mobilization in Support of Sanctions Against South Africa, that is an international action within the UN framework. We would all like relations between the great powers to be normal and continually improve. I was very upset to hear that the latest aviation technology was sold to the racist regime.

Host: There is another aspect that usually is not covered in the American press: apartheid in its contemporary form, which we regard as "acute racism," stems from

anticommunist trends in South Africa. Legislation underwent radical changes in South Africa during the McCarthy period. So one of the reasons why the United States supports apartheid, in addition to our own racist traditions, is due to anticommunism. Could you say something about that?

Aitmatov: That's not news to us. Nothing could be easier than to justify one's reactionary activities by pointing to a "communist threat.". I don't know how you'd say this in English but in Russian we say that this is "casting a shadow on a wattle fence," which means confusing the issue. Maneuvers are undertaken to distort the truth. And the truth is that the enormous bulk of the black population in South Africa still lives in inhuman conditions. These people have high unemployment, pitiful medical care and no education. Meanwhile the white minority enjoys all the benefits of that wealthy country. How can people be deprived of their right to an education and be denied access to the great achievements of world culture?! This is not even to mention the brutal exploitation of the native population of South Africa. This cannot be allowed to persist!

History is made not just with good intentions. It has its laws of development. A regime must not be supported that causes its own people to suffer, a regime that deprives people of the possibility of cultural resurrection. Can this kind of injustice be tolerated just because the South African ruling elite is anticommunist? To continue aiding this policy is criminal. All the political aspects aside, it is simply inhuman. Your reactionary forces are not only not helping to solve the problem, but are making it worse.

Host: I'd like to continue. Is your concern partly because you are a Kirghiz and are trying to preserve the culture of your own people? Could you speak at greater length about ethnic minorities in the Soviet Union?

Aitmatov: Gladly. First, I want to say that my concern about racial problems is perhaps due to the fact that before the 1917 socialist revolution we had similar problems. But now that is a thing of the past. We have begun to forget about those difficult times. Our young generation knows about it only from history books. We Kirghiz people constitute one of the fifteen equal constituent republics. We do not have an inferiority complex as an ethnic minority. For us the term "ethnic minority" simply denotes quantity, not quality.

Host: What about in cultural terms?

Aitmatov: In cultural terms I think we have very interesting experience. I think that in time many countries and peoples will learn from our experience. All major countries are multiethnic states. And the domestic problems of these states—cooperation and relations between different ethnic groups—are extremely significant to them.

We have different vitally important economic problems, problems in the services, health care, construction, etc., but I do not know any negative ethnic problems that are cause for concern. The Soviet Union's nationalities policy is a major innovation of the 20th century. As a member of an ethnic minority I do not feel I am a "minoriry." The books I write in Kirghiz and Russian have huge print runs. My readers belong to diverse ethnic groups. There are over a hundred of them in the Soviet Union. People from all over write me letters commenting on my books.

Host: Aren't some of your books also published in English?

Aitmatov: Yes, of course, a whole number of them have been printed in Britain and in English-speaking Africa. Recently I received an official statement informing me that in the past five years around 90 different foreign publishing houses have put out my books in various languages. The largest number of them were printed in Europe. I'd like to take this opportunity to say that our cultural relations with the United States leave much to be desired. There is no comparison between those relations and the contacts we have with European cultures.

Incidentally, after the UN Session, diplomats, representatives from Finland, Sweden, Hungary, Italy, Mongolia and other countries came up to me and asked me about books. We talked about literature. But none of the Americans approached me. I don't want to reproach them; I just want to say that the better we know each other the more it'll help solve global problems.

Host: I imagine that some writers are listening now. When you come here to the United States can you plan ahead for meetings with your American counterparts?

Aitmatov: Yes I can. But this time that wasn't my goal. I figured that when I got here I'd check out the situation and determine whether I'd have the time.

There were many callers during the program. Listeners had a wide variety of questions. For instance, they asked about Jewish emigrés from the Soviet Union and expressed diametrically opposed viewpoints. Some of them talked about the matter the same way as the commercial media in the US. Others displayed objectivity and understanding of the problem. People asked about the "Berlin Wall," about the American-Soviet cultural exchange that had been undermined by the Washington administration. They were particularly interested in fighting apartheid in South Africa, a symbol of racial discrimination in the modern world.

Caller: What can other countries do to put an end to this situation in South Africa?

Aitmatov: First of all, I think, that widespread moral condemnation is necessary. In addition, governments can impose sanctions—economic, political and cultural.

We know from time immemorial that not only those who are oppressed are slaves, but also those who oppress others. Those who take away the freedom of others do the same to themselves. They become slaves to their own violence. They do not have their own inner freedom. The oppressors in the apartheid regime isolate themselves from the rest of the world; in the end they isolate themselves from universal culture. Therefore if public opinion comes out against apartheid as an inhuman form of mutual relations this alone will promote progress.

Host: Do you also mean the moral condemnation of all countries that support apartheid?

Aitmatov: Absolutely. A government might support apartheid but the public can condemn it.

Host: Let's hope that in the United States their numbers will increase.

Caller: What if South Africa does not give in to this kind of pressure? What should be done in this case?

Aitmatov: First, it doesn't depend on my recommendations. As you know the native population has had to resort to fighting. There are many examples.

Host: We see that the struggle in South Africa is growing.

Aitmatov: Of course it is. It is turning into guerrilla warfare, especially in Namibia. As you know SWAPO has enough military strength; and this strength is growing. Of course it would be better to settle the problem by peaceful means.

Host: I would like to remind listeners that at the beginning of the week South African troops invaded Angola and killed over 200 Angolans.

Some of the listeners's questions were prompted by the administration's slander campaign about the use of chemical weapons by the Soviet Union. It was clear from remarks by ordinary Americans talking to the Soviet writer that this myth was totally unfounded. Whenever the US Administration "discovers" somewhere some kind of chemicals, said one listener, it accuses the Russians of waging chemical warfare. We veterans, he stressed, know that we were the victims of American chemical warfare waged against the Vietnamese.

John Fisker pointed out that there was no proof to back up claims by the US that the Soviet Union was waging chemical warfare. Whenever the United States is up to something, he stressed, it charges the Soviet Union with doing the same thing or something even worse.

Caller: How is the term "ethnic minority" understood in the Soviet Union and is it derogatory or not?

Aitmatov: This term has no bad connotations for us, although we rarely use it. We don't ever need to. We are developing our own language, culture and science. We travel to other countries where Soviet festivals are held featuring one or another constituent republic. Kirghizia, for instance, has taken part in such festivals in Sweden, France and other countries. And we host various foreign groups. They learn about our country and we want to learn about the cultures of other peoples. As I already said, our ethnic minorities are natives in their territory. But you also have natives—the Indians. My impression is that they do not enjoy any privileges.

Host: We know quite a bit about the Indians, although the press doesn't say much about them. The reservation system is a system of cultural annihilation. This is undoubtedly a type of genocide.

Aitmatov: I am the chairman of the Kirghiz Union of Filmmakers. I am also connected with the theater and the Academy of Sciences. Perhaps our listeners are interested in these subjects too. I will try to answer such questions. The development of literature and the arts is one way to gauge a society.

Caller: I was in the European part of the Soviet Union. As far as I know from what I saw and heard, you can go

to any school or work anywhere you want if you are willing to give up your ethnic identity. What the Soviet government is doing for blacks in Africa is motivated more by the desire to expand its influence in the world.

Aitmatov: If I understood you correctly you're saying that in the Soviet Union you can get an education only if you give up your ethnic identity. I can't agree with that at all. We have ethnic groups with populations of 30,000 to 40,000 and they have their own schools. Would you like me to name those ethnic groups? The Dungane live in our republic and they have their own schools and their own teachers. There are also small ethnic groups in the Caucasus. I know a lot, for instance, about the Balkars. There aren't many of them either. They also have their own educational system, their own literature, myths and history. This is not even to mention the more numerous ethnic groups that comprise the bulk of the population in the constituent republics. I can't say we don't have any problems in this respect; that wouldn't be true. Life wouldn't be interesting if we didn't have to overcome obstacles and think about promoting culture and ethnic identity.

Incidentally, in our republic's capital, Frunze, formerly Pishpek, we recently put up a monument to the hero of our age-old epos, *Manas*. This age-old folk saga gained its material embodiment. Isn't that an expression of ethnic dignity?

I don't want you to think I'm simply giving you the official line. I have my own views of things. But it's absolutely wrong to think that the foreign policy of the Soviet Union is to spread its influence in different continents and that's supposedly why the USSR is defending the oppressed. We live too far away from South Africa. We don't even have an embassy there. And we have enough of our own problems at home.

If peoples have risen to struggle it means they cannot take it any longer. Isn't that right? Shouldn't we be able to talk about this without being afraid the West would think we're trying to spread our influence?

Host: I think that one problem any country in the 20th century faces is the impact of technology and industry on the development of culture, and the preservation of cultural traditions. This problem is a serious one everywhere.

Aitmatov: Without a doubt. We are all experiencing the scientific and technological revolution. The goal of

preserving our cultural heritage means first and foremost that we must approach this goal conscientiously. In our country this is considered an extremely important question. It isn't possible to preserve everything, but we don't part very easily with the past either.

Caller: I would like to ask your respected guest what is happening with the cultural exchange program between the Soviet Union and United States? The superb Bolshoi Theater and violinists used to come here. We are really suffering because we can no longer see your performers. Do you think this will all be resumed in the near future?

Aitmatov: The question you've asked bothers me as much as you. You'd do better to ask Mr. Reagan. The first time I visited the United States was in 1975. Now I remember it as if it were a dream. I came to see the première of my play at the Arena Stage in Washington. That same year the Bolshoi Theater was in New York. There were other groups that came here, too, and your theaters visited us. It was wonderful! We felt like people who were worthy of belonging to two great nations.

It's not our fault this isn't happening today. We want to come here and we want to see your cultural figures in our country. I believe that the aggravated political relations are to blame. They are the result of the actions of your government which is putting up not only economic barriers, but cultural ones as well. At any rate I must say that this is not a normal situation. It cannot last forever. Two great nations cannot exist in cultural isolation from each other. The time will come when we will bring you our best performers and we will see yours in the Soviet Union.

Caller: Many questions have been raised, including apartheid. But you haven't talked about Afghanistan. Afghanistan has for some reason remained in the background even though that country is right next to you. Yet this hasn't been mentioned.

Aitmatov: You're absolutely correct that Afghanistan is right next to us. Yes, my people have lived next to the Afghan people since time immemorial. Some Kirghiz people live in the mountains of Afghanistan. Many of our compatriots—Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmen and Kazakhs—account for a large part of Afhanistan's population.

In the past when Afghan writers and other cultural figures from Afghanistan visited the Soviet Union they went away astounded by our accomplishments; they saw the enormous transformations that had taken place in

our Asian republics. This isn't boasting. Don't you think the Afghans wanted their life to improve? Afghanistan will be pursuing progressive socio-cultural development. The people have begun a struggle to transform their lives. Now because of extreme political and historical necessity, since Afghanistan was the victim of aggression, our country had to agree to the Afghan government's request for our support of their revolutionary changes. Our assistance there will some day be evaluated in a positive way. I have no doubts about that. It is a new form of relations between nations. Many people in the United States don't seem to understand that.

In conclusion I would like to say that I am glad to be in this studio and have a chance to answer your questions, although I am sure that I was not able to give exhaustive answers. I would like to thank you for listening. We should support the best possible relations both between governments and between individuals. This is in the interests of both our peoples. For this to happen each of us must work on promoting the kind of atmosphere worthy of human life in our time.

1982

REACHING THE HEARTS OF PEOPLE

A Dialogue with Faiz Ahmad Faiz

Chinghiz Aitmatov: It has been twenty-five years since writers of Asia and Africa first met in Tashkent. They came together specially to seek ways to level out the differences in the development of the peoples on their continents resulting from colonial domination. Today, as never before, it is obvious that this conference held in Tashkent in 1958 was truly a historical development. Faiz was one of the founders of the movement of Asian and African writers. So perhaps we could try to analyze what we started out with and where we are today?

Faiz[1]: All right, let's try. I think we agree that the past quarter of a century was filled with exremely important events that changed the world and every one of us in it. Our movement, as you just said, emerged as a result of the collapse of colonial empires at a time when imperialism, not wasting a minute, began operating from the flanks—from the positions of neocolonialism. It withdrew from these colonies officially but left behind its roots by creating spheres of economic and cultural oppression. This prompted a response—the consolidation of progressive forces in the face of imperialism's new maneuver.

Of all the factors responsible for the association of writers from the former colonies, the most important in my opinion was the development of a new mentality among the people that stemmed from a new-found independence after having been oppressed for so long. What was needed was spiritual decolonization as soon as possible; this is one of the most important and most complicated aspects of decolonization in general. And so the times demanded unified efforts and an exchange of experience.

Aitmatov: I would like to add that people realized just at that time the need to expand contacts, including and perhaps above all those in the cultural field. The foundation for contacts of a new type—organized, not spontane-

ous—has been laid. Peoples in the newly-independent countries had a special need for this—after all, they had to break down the wall of age-old colonial isolation. Similar processes were under way around the world, as new technological possibilities arose for establishing these ties: the all-pervasive mass media, means of transportation and a whole infrastructure intended to help communication between individuals and peoples. The main thing was that people came to realize that the history of human development had reached the point when the isolated existence of peoples was no longer possible.

Faiz: So the Association of Asian and African Writers is in the spirit of the times. You know that even in antiquity there were good trade routes between the different geographical regions of the two continents, and the boats and caravans that were transporting goods were facilitating the exchange of cultural values. Today it is useless to speculate on how world culture would have developed if the traditional ties within Asia and Africa and the natural ties between East and West had not been forcibly terminated by colonialism and all contacts reduced to those between the mother country and the colony, i.e., between the victors and the defeated. This stopped the development of the traditional cultures of the defeated peoples at the level they had reached before colonialism. This also helped promote the native elite who were educated according to Western standards and alienated from their own ethnic roots, sometimes even from their own language. A writer was caught in a double ring of alienation—from himeslf since no biological miracle could make him a European, and from his people who held on to their traditional culture.

Aitmatov: That is how marginal man developed, a person between...

Faiz: Yes, of course, and in addition to that was a writer's alienation from world artistic thought. He could only get to it through the colonizers. In light of all this you can see how important it was for writers in Asia and Africa to establish contacts. It was not a simple thing to do and no wonder, because so much was being attempted for the first time. It wasn't easy to make the transition from ardent declarations to literature that reflected a profound study of life. I think that today the best works of Afrian and Asian writers are on a par with the modern classics of world literature. If we hadn't been able to compare ourselves with others and model our-

selves after others who came before us it would have taken centuries to accomplish what we have managed in a matter of decades.

Aitmatov: While maintaining their distinct features, the various nations have become so close that this has become a factor of history—all of us are experiencing the mutual influence of cultures. This is one of the most typical characteristics of our time. Furthermore it is a factor that has a long-term effect whose future consequences are hard to predict. It is up to futurologists to build models for planetary or perhaps galactic culture, but the need to understand the processes under way today stems from our everyday experiences. To me they are extremely, even vitally important. I am a man of two cultures. I belong to an Asian ethnic group with a small population, typical of most ethnic groups in the world, and I just happen to live in two language environments—I think, speak and write in two languages: in my native Kirghiz and Russian. The Russian language is a language of great literary traditions and it rightfully has a prominent status among the Soviet peoples as the official language of this multiethnic country. Therefore it is extremely and vitally important, as I already said, that in each region the local languages and Russian coexist and influence each other harmoniously and fairly. That is the substance of our language policy—Russian assists in learning about world culture while local languages are developed and fostered, thus ensuring them genuine opportunities and prospects. In other words, we are familiar enough with many of the problems that the intelligentsia of developing counties are experiencing. The one substantial difference, of course, is that we followed a socialist course, and were the first ones in the world to do so.

Faiz: The 1917 socialist revolution was the beginning of the revolution in the awareness of all colonial and dependent peoples. That is why we pay special attention to Soviet literature: for us it is, in addition to everything else, a mirror of the soul of man in the new world. You know the prestige of Soviet literature in the world and what influence it has on Asia and Africa in particular. Our countries gained real access to Soviet literature only after they became free. When we gained independence we became unified against the cultural aggression of neocolonialism; this struggle was a powerful impetus for the unity of Asian and African writers.

Aitmatov: Agostino Neto was absolutely right when he

said: we are our cultures. The confrontation of the unique cultures of Asia and Africa to Western culture, in the broad sense of the term, began with colonial invasion but far from ended with the winning of independence. Western culture never did take root among the masses. One reason was the lack of the technical means for its mass dissemination and another was that the colonizers had no vested interests in doing this. Why? For the missionaries it was enough to gradually convert the natives to Christianity and for the colonial officials it was enough to train as help some of the local nobility among the collaborationists who were prepared, as is always the case in history, to compromise any of their national interests for the sake of temporary gains and be the apprentices of the ruling forces. Today's neocolonialists are different: they possess a powerful and all-pervasive means of daily mass influence which is used in a calculated way to manipulate people's minds and advance the Western value system. Under the circumstances it has become more difficult to defend unique cultural traits (without fetishization however). While continuing to be an important aspect of efforts in Asia and Africa for total and genuine spiritual sovereignty, this defense of unique cultural traits has become in a somewhat different way a universal struggle.

I believe that the diverse manifestations of cultural life, in light of modern means of communication, should strengthen this inner independence, prevent stereotyped and biased thinking and foster the skills of idependent thinking. I am not sure I'm right, but it seems to me that books can play the most important role.

Whether we writers like it or not, books are part of the mass media, although audiovisual techniques are in first place. It is harder to be a reader than a viewer, not only because a reader must at least know how to read, but also because reading requires an active effort. In contrast to movies, television and even video films, books always allow the reader to go back over the story, get a better feeling for the subtleties, and decide on how quickly to read and perceive and argue with the author. Reading is always a dialogue, a silent dialogue between the reader and the book. I believe that this feature of literature gives me good reason to feel as before that it is the best perfected instrument of cognition and the most universal means of artistic culture.

Fais: You see, I am by nature first and foremost a

reader. In addition to that I write. What could be better than books?! But literature is the flesh of language. You already mentioned the problems of ethnic languages. In multilingual countries like yours and mine before you can teach children to read you have to decide what language they will use. The Soviet Union is usually put forth as an example of a country that has solved the language problem better than any other. Although many countries, especially those in Africa and Asia, study your experience and incorporate it at least partially, real results can only be expected in a socialist state. Some solution has to be found urgently, though, since the elimination of illiteracy cannot be postponed. The question, therefore, arises, what language should be used as the main one for communication within the country? The language of the colonizers? One of the local languages, thus triggering an explosion of nationalistic emotions? After all, it's hard not to be emotional about one's native language. There are two points of view on this. The language of the former colonizers is foreign to us in spirit; it is the language of enslavement and unless we give it up we won't be able to develop our own languages and will thus undermine our own identity. Another viewpoint is that we accept the language we have inherited by fate and try to modify it so that it corresponds to the specific features of our ethnic nature and culture. This language will synthesize with our languages—the child of a mixed marriage will begin living separately from his parents. You realize that I am symplifying both opinions, but that is what they are in essence.

Aitmatov: That problem is of great concern to me as you can see. I'd like to point out that the language issue around the world is one of the main ones in cultural policy, and at present it is particularly acute. How humankind will communicate in the distant future will depend on an enormous number of demographic, socio-economic, and scientific-technical factors. In the meantime I think we need exceptional tact and discretion when it comes to the language issue. The socio-historical maturity of a society is manifested best by the approach to its language or languages. I risk being repetitious but I would like to stress once again that I believe that in the conditions of the 20th century the means of preserving and developing languages along with avoiding provincial and stifling isolation is bilingualism—a dialectical, double-track process. I do not see any other way. In this respect

our experience in the Soviet Union undoubtedly should be closely examined and perhaps followed. This does not mean that we have already managed to solve all the problems, dotted all the "i's" and crossed all the "t's." Its not such a simple matter to find a good balance between "mastering" a world language, the lingua franca, and "preserving" the native language. Administrative measures are impermissable in achieving this "balance." A language policy must be flexible and based on a dialectical approach and the development of social structures in general. The extremist viewpoints simply have no right to exist: neither lingual isolationism nor attempts to grow linguistic hybrids in "test tubes." This is just impossible! Language is a living matter and it lives according to its own laws!

Faiz: It is possible to teach two or even three languages. It is hard, it takes time and effort, but it is possible!

Aitmatov: That's the whole point! And you can avoid unnecessary emotions if you regard a second language as an instrument of communication, a multipurpose instrument that serves everyone who uses it.

Faiz: I would just like to add one more point—language policy should take into account realistic factors and that the world has changed so much that people can no longer live isolated from others, a fact we keep coming back to in our conversation. That means that language policy should be oriented to developing new and broader possibilities for communication.

Aitmatov: No matter what we talk about we keep coming back to the problem of the changes under way all over the world and the acute need to analyze them reasonably. The particular is still subject to the general. And, of course, the basic difference between modern times and all previous eras is that humankind is capable of destroying itself, a terrible but indisputable fact.

Faiz: And all our activities should be aimed toward what's most important—prevention of the destruction of humankind. We must always remember that we all have to live together, that no matter what our political, ideological and religious differences are, no problems can be solved by the use of force.

Aitmatov: Humankind of different colors, torn by contradictions, divided into classes, political systems and blocks, and existing simultaneously in different historical periods, this humankind faces a common danger. Any day a worldwide nuclear slaughter could begin and all of

us could be victims of what is so unimaginable no matter how long you think about it—the destruction of life on earth. This means that everything that existed before us would perish along with ourselves and that the future would never be. So perhaps now artistic thought should be oriented to the unprecedented anxiety of hearts and minds in response to this impending danger, a sense of common responsibility, the realization that it is impossible to get rid of this danger quickly but that the need to is urgent, perhaps such artistic thought having completely immersed in this state of mind will gain from it great insight.

Faiz: This is true, but one thought gives me no peace. You, Chinghiz, are much younger than I am, but I remember the thirties very well when fascism first raised its head and progressive people understood its threat to the world. I am not just talking about the antifascist front, but the general emotional atmosphere of those years and the need every rational human being felt to fight that abominable plague.

The threat looming over us now is many times greater than the menace of fascism. It is incomparable! But I keep asking myself: could we put so much passion into the struggle against collective suicide and create the same kind of emotional atmosphere of fierce resistance to antihuman plans? It is with bitterness that I have to say the answer so far is no. Have we been able to produce literary works that are as emotionally effective as the antifascist literature was of the past?

Aitmatov: That's a tough question, but you have every reason to ask it. Let's see. Fascism, although it was terrifying and disgusting, was still confined within the framework of notions of evil. And it was concrete; it could be seen and hated. A person could say to himself—I will never resign myself to this. But now humankind has entered a new threshold of cognition and is clearly unprepared for it either socially or morally. We now possess the energy of cosmic power and are using it to threaten ourselves. It is frightening when forces in the West talk openly about using nuclear power against "dissenting" societies. They are prepared to do this for the sake of preserving their socio-economic system, although no system can serve as a justification when life itself is at stake... It is impossible to think abstractly about the probability of such a holocaust—even factual information ushers up a rush of emotions. Perhaps the nature of these

emotions is such that it it hard to translate them into the imagery of art. The growing strength of peace demonstrations are already evidence that people do understand the menace. As for us writers in these terrible times, we really must find a way to reach people's hearts to persuade them that we cannot be resigned to the destruction of life on earth.

Faiz: Our fall meeting in Tashkent centers around the problems of writers and the modern world. Undoubtedly the subject of war and peace will be the focus of the conference which reflects the writers' creative quests for ways to avert the danger to our planet.

1983

THE EPOS OF VICTORY

Epos was always a sacred word for a people; it was the people's legend. This is also the case today in our times of creative individuality. A 20th century epos is the combination of profound moral, philosophical and artistic phenomena which are rooted in life, in history, in culture and in urgent concerns posed by reality. Today's epos is connected with the colossal events experienced by the Soviet people during World War II. The pathos of this epos is Victory. Victory is our fate: it is all that we suffered, understood and gained during the bloodiest and severest battle against fascism... The Trojan War that Homer described in the *Iliad* seems quite insignificant by comparison, although it gave cause for thought for thousands of years.

This idea about the great importance of the modern universal epos came to me at the new Jenish-Ayant Square (Victory Square) in my native Frunze. There I saw the expression of a new folk epos and thus am trying to analyze the essence of that outstanding event...

But first a little about myself and the times that coincided with my formative years. After all, epics are not understood by people right away; this takes years. Although I did not fight, I consider myself part of the war generation; if the war had lasted one year longer I would have been drafted. But I remember the war from the very first day in our large village of Sheker when the messenger of the village Soviet rushed on horseback from house to house reporting the news and up until the very last day, May 9, 1945. We had been counting not only the days but the hours to the final moment of Victory. The news spread like wild fire. Everyone was joyful and apprehensive, as though it was too good to be true. People wanted real proof. At our Sary-Kubinsky district center there was a gathering of messengers from each collective farm who were ready to set off on their fastest horses to get the news out to the long-suffering people

just as soon as the government statement came in. In those days there were no telephones and radios in our villages. (This information is for young people today who may not know.) So those villages that were closest to the district center found out earlier and those that were farther learned later. Our Sheker was farthest away; all that was behind it was the mountains with their snow-capped peaks. Every single one of the soldiers who returned from the war told us that when they saw those mountains they cried for joy.

That day a huge crowd formed on a hillock (our village was in an elevated site), young and old alike, waiting for our messenger. Of course we gathered a lot earlier than we had to—some women who had left newly-calved cows at home left to milk them and then returned to the hillock. When we saw the dust rise from the messenger on horseback everyone cheered and the crowd rushed toward the rider—we knew without a doubt that he had come to announce the Victory. Victory! At last! Some had come on horseback and othes on foot. I remember how our school teacher ran toward the messenger; her son had been in the artillery the entire war. Disabled soldiers rushed forward the best they could, even those on crutches. Mothers, widows, wives and fiancés, all those who were waiting for their loved ones, ran ahead. But those who ran the fastest were us, the teenagers, the children of war, the ploughmen and the sowers during those bitter years. Later I tried to write about that in my novel *The Cranes Fly Early*, but that would be much later. That day we rushed toward the messenger of Victory.

There in Berlin our strength and truth triumphed over nazism. How much suffering it had taken on the part of every single person, every single ethnic group and all of the multiethnic Soviet society in general. And if you are a part of the people and the people are your element without which you cannot live, then there is no greater joy than the joy of your people's victory over the enemy.

It was this feeling of patriotic duty that was expressed so long ago in *Manas*, the ancient Kirghiz epos:

...Look at your people,
Before you go into battle
Look at your people,
When the outcome seems grim
Look at your people,

When the glorious victory has arrived
Look at your people,
In a great march
Look at you people,
Going through mountain ridges together
Look,
Who you are living with on one mountain
Look,
Whom you are bidding farewell before death
Look,
Can you hope for a better fate,
Look...

I used to dream a lot about how we ran to meet the messenger of Victory. Everything that I had seen and felt in those days, everything that had been imprinted in my heart and memory, the major and minor events, flashed through my mind like scenes from a movie—the new recruits with their backpacks leaving the village; the roll call outside the draft board when women, tears streaming down their cheeks, seemed to stutter and whisper something upon hearing the name of their loved one called; the farewells at the railway station; the night troop echelons endlessly carrying soldiers to the front; the news that spread throughout Kirghizia about the first man from our Sary-Kubisky area to be given the title of Hero of the Soviet Union—19-year-old Cholponbai Tuleberdiev—who had used his own body to block an enemy gun port in fighting at Voronezh around the same time that Alexander Matrosov did the same on another front. We went to look at a house that we had previously passed by many times without giving it a second thought. It was a house typical of those days—made of adobe, with a thick roof covered with clay and with small windows—except that it was Cholponbai's house. We felt sorry for his old mother who now lived alone and were proud of him, swearing by his name like the name of Manas. After all, Manas had also been killed defending his land and his people against enemies. The epos tells about how all the people mourned the death of the great folk hero. Now that scene was associated in our minds with the unparalleled feat of our young Cholponbai who was just a few years older than my friends and I. We will remember him for the rest of our lives by the photograph of him in uniform—what a truly handsome, inspired face that young man had! He became like a brother to us; the mere men-

tion of his name filled our hearts with pride for our people and with courage. I remember how we met each wounded soldier who returned from the war, listening eagerly to every word he said. I remember what a terrible job it was to deliver the notifications informing families of the death of a loved one; but I had to do it because there were so few adults, as a fourteen-year-old I worked as secretary of the Sheker village Soviet. A mere teenager, I saw and heard widows weeping and orphaned children crying. As the war dragged on and on, one of my jobs as a local official was to collect military taxes from the impoverished people who were donating their last kopecks to build tanks in order to defeat the Nazi invaders as fast as possible and hasten the return of our soldiers...

And how amazingly quick time has flown by for the war generations that carried the whole burden of the worldwide fight against fascism. Now we are marking the fortieth anniversary since VE-day. But to me it seems like just yesterday, as if I were still running toward that messenger on horseback, the messenger of the victorious end of the war. Since then a whole era has passed, having left a deep imprint on the modern world.

Naturally, much water has passed under the bridge since then; numerous events of the century have taken place in our time, including those that were unprecedented in the history of the human race. But nothing has been able to dim the memory of what people around the world experienced on that unforgettable May 9 in the unforgettable year of 1945, for I do believe that we owe all the best characteristics in people today, in the world of today, to that Victory. All of us come from that Victory, from that turning point that launched the postwar stage in the global history of humankind.

An epos is a native chronicle, the great and endless tale of a people; and every era has something to add to the epos. This was brought home to me once again just recently when Victory Square was about to be opened in Frunze. I walked around the place for a long time looking at the finished work. Gripped by emotion, I noticed that the longer I looked at the composition, at the vivid expression of this unique sculptural-architectural ensemble, the more I could see that the artists had truly captured the profound essence of the Kirghiz people's history in its epic dimension.

In the very center of the city, where the old market used to be, Victory Square had appeared—this great epos

of Victory in stone and bronze in honor of those who had defended their country.

As in any epos that emerges from the depths of folk poetry, the central figure of the ensemble is the traditional portrayal of the Mother image, Meken-Ene, Motherland. But in this case she is elevated to the universal significance of all mothers on earth, past and present. Grand and eternal, like nature itself, Meken-Ene is waiting for the victorious soldiers, those who survived the flames of war and who are returning to her, to mother's fireside. It is also an Eternal Flame to those who will never return. Her joy is restrained since many of her sons remained on the battlefields. Her kindness and courage being infinite, Meken-Ene stands at the head of the entire square against the background of the eternally snow-capped Ala-Too Mountains that rise above the city. Meken-Ene's head is crowned by the cupola of a traditional Kirghiz tent—three granite pylons are bent over her forming the contours of the ancient Kirghiz abode. The artists meant for the mother, home and fireside to symbolize life and one's native land.

The composition was created by the outstanding Kirghiz sculptor, Turgunbai Sadykov. He also designed a sculptural compostion of soldiers met by children; all of them face the Mother who is waiting for them by the fireside in front of her tent. Epic depth, confidence, courage and calmness characterize the soldiers who have undergone the terrible ordeals of war...

But the emotional focus of the figurative structure of the monument is in another group of soldiers who are also heading toward the Mother. This is truly a masterpiece; it is referred to as the Anikushin masterpiece in Kirghizia. Two soldiers, two machine-gunners sculptured by Mikhail Anikushin are a vivid fragment of severe front-line reality. Fire, gunpowder and total exhaustion emanate from these young soldiers carrying disassembled machine-guns on the march. They appear to be growing stronger before our very eyes in these conditions that demand the utlimate in physical and spiritual strength. They are figures of rare dramatic expression. It is impossible to look at them apathetically; you want to get up close. I am very happy that one of Anikushin's masterpieces belongs now to Kirghizia, is on our soil. This joint endeavor by Russian and Kirghiz masters to create the heroic Victory monument in the Kirghiz capital reflects the main philosophical thrust of this monumental com-

position—the affirmation of genuine internationalism that is inherent in our society, inherent in the Soviet people in their work and in their struggle. It is no accident that the faces of the soldiers are Russian and Kirghiz. One of the outstanding historical features of World War II is that during that terrible ordeal the concept of Soviet patriotism took on the ultimate of significance which was recognized by all the people—we are proud that all the peoples in our Motherland, that everyone defended the socialist state believing it was their sacred, revolutionary and civic duty, believing it was vitally necessary both for national and international interests. This is the message of the epos of Victory on our square.

If in the past an epos in Kirghizia lived only in poetic and oral form, now it is visual—on this square the eternal past meets with the living present, building a bridge for the spiritual continuity of generations.

The soldiers are marching and the Mother awaits them by the fireside...

May 5, 1985

We are already used to counting the days and weeks of 1985, which recently was still fresh and exciting with the smell of conifers. Yet one more year vanished, becoming a mere recollection like a dot receding into eternity. Another year in our life flashed by in what felt like an instant, just like the years before. And once again, growing faster with the impact of modern history, time has sped into another lap. That is how it will always be, as long as there is life...

But each time another year comes along at the will of celestial mechanics people suddenly wonder—what lies ahead? This sacramental quest of the human spirit stems not only from the fact that everyone traditionally wants happiness for himself and his loved ones. Incidentally, what constitutes happiness largely depends on the particular set of values of the individual and the society. Soul-searching at the start of a new time lap entails much more—all of reality in its most diverse manifestations and parameters, starting with the cardinal problems of existence, important undertakings and ideas initiated, and ending with the ordinary and eternal cares about earning one's daily bread.

I realize that I am writing about these things a little late. The days fly by faster than you think. However I hope that what is important is not the calendar, but the substance of my thoughts...

It crossed my mind that from the beginning of 1985, exactly fifteen years remain until the year 2000. Fifteen years! What a thought! It is not merely that this number has a magic ring to it, but that one can vividly imagine how adolescents who are fifteen now will be thirty in the year 2000, and they will stand on the threshold of the third millennium at the finest time of their lives. To be quite honest, I envy and already rejoice for those who will be thirty then. A unique and, if you will, truly magical coincidence! And there is not long to wait, that is if

the world reaches this most important historical landmark without suffering a total catastrophe of some kind.

Is mankind destined to cross the threshold of the third millennium with all the greatness of human reason and the achievements of civilization? Ought we to be thinking about this now? And yet, why not? After all, if one bears in mind the entire conceivable length of time the human race has existed on earth, then relatively speaking, mere hours and minutes remain. The train of the year 2000 can already be heard on the last stage, its outline is already visible and the signals are open. At this distance, it is hard to stop oneself from wondering quite naturally, what human life will be like in the 21st century.

Of course, it is not a case of arithmetical chronology independent of our will, but rather of what the new century promises, what lies in store for us, programmed by our own activities. Indeed, people are already thinking about this. Such was the case at the Assembly of the European Academy of Science, Art and Literature which was held recently, this time in Stockholm, and of which I am a member. This international, non-governmental academic organisation unites scientific and cultural figures. The speeches of its members—scientists and thinkers—also contained "rough drafts" of scientific prognoses and futurological forecasts about life on earth in the year 2000. The question has thus been posed. So, how are we to face tomorrow?

There is a fundamental and generally acknowledged law that has been tested by the entire course of existence, namely, the undeviating tendency in living things to grow and multiply. In this movement, the living invariably conquers the forces of destruction, whatever form they may take. This is the supreme logic of the nature of things, consisting in protein's indestructible biological property of self-preservation. Just as axiomatically, the law of existence is transformed in social life, i.e., the organized will of the masses struggling for peace and a better life, and the desire of human beings to live and continue their race in the unbroken line of generations.

Today, fanatic militarism is encroaching on the very foundations of existence. And the fact that the leaders of America, ignoring appeals from the Soviet Union, are planning to fill outer space with weapons supposedly for the purpose of self-defense, represents a global crime against our entire planet. An evil-doer can find justifica-

tion for any evil. The swift development of military technology for outer space is the ultimate evil. They can go no further. All that remains is for them to raise their hands against God, the very God in whom they claim to believe.

This is what one is forced to contemplate when talking of the common appeal which has become a familiar refrain, if not an incantation in all areas inhabited by humans, the appeal to preserve peace throughout the world. "Preserve peace!" How simple, concise and trusting! One might, however, wonder why we ask ourselves for peace. Is that not an irony of fate?

Without going into the causes and details of the world nuclear crisis, which are sufficiently well-known, I would like to direct the attention of present generations, on whom the solution to the problem "to be or not to be" ultimately depends, to a point which should, in my view, become the personal concern of everyone everywhere, along with the daily problem of earning a living. I mean the recognition on all levels of existing social structures of the unconditional and overriding problem of the century, namely, the task of preventing a thermonuclear war between East and West which would shatter civilization and annihilate as such conscious life itself as a form of matter.

Everything that mankind has achieved over thousands of years of cultural development, all that is unique in our galaxy, would be brought to an end forever by a nuclear war, thus signifying the human race's final act, an act of self-destruction. For this reason, the time has come for us to seek universal agreement between peoples and states that they will absolutely refuse to produce and use nuclear arms. If such a global agreement were to be reached at the turn of the millennium, it would be our greatest legacy for the future, an achievement and a "gain" and our most important gift to young people and to future generations.

Here, I find myself wondering whether this is not the naive pacifist and idealist within me speaking. For, after all, it is no easy matter to achieve a nuclear ban in this world of fierce confrontation, and in an atmosphere of unabating ideological struggle between irreconcilable antipodes, between socialism and capitalism. Years and years of intensive discussion, reciprocal accusations, claims, efforts and negotiations go by—all in order to attain strategic agreement between East and West. But

surely the situation is not really so deadlocked that it is impossible to solve? Surely the tragedy of the human spirit is not so hopeless that the discovery of the elementary structure of matter—the structure of the atom—is to be the last, fatal step in revealing the secrets of the organization of the world, simply because the sides are unable to find a stable, and universally acceptable, world order. Surely madness is not superior to reason? Surely reason's foreordination has not been exhausted?

There is a legend, though it may in fact be true, that twelve European physicists on the eve of World War II could have agreed among themselves, and indeed, it is said that they tried to agree to conceal the results of atomic discoveries from the world public. To begin with, it was research still at the laboratory stage. But apparently the twelve met but failed to find a common language for whatever reasons. This is not surprising since what is the complexity of the atomic nucleus in comparison with the inscrutable complexity of human nature! Whatever the case may be, at first glance it is a fact to be eternally regretted and in analogy with the Bible, an event equivalent to the crucifixion of Christ.

Some intellectuals to this day regret in all sincerity that those twelve physicists did not halt their research and bury forever this trend of scientific thought, and thus gave an impetus to such a dangerous turn of events on earth. Even if this story is not mere legend, it is hard to take such opinions seriously, for it is difficult to hold history "corked in a bottle." To put one's trust in such a course of events would be hopeless, futile and, what is more, extremely regressive.

Man's reason is a powerful weapon in any situation. Through endless cognition of the world and transformation and adaptation of existence to meet man's never-ending requirements, reason is all-powerful and inexhaustible. I believe that the creative resources of reason can be equated only to the energy resources of the sun. There is a fine old saying that beauty will save the world, but I would merely like to add that reason still has the last word. Is this not proven by the fact that in the present situation of world movements, popular peace campaigns against nuclear weapons and the arms race, the collective reason of our age is acquiring new, unprecedented qualities of contemporary social awareness in the "reactor" of struggle and the "amplifiers" of the mass media? The years of struggle for peace and the preven-

tion of a thermonuclear holocaust on earth is eroding the traditional "technology" of military thinking that has formed over the centuries and millennia in generation after generation, and is developing in people the philosophy of global preservation of life, which is a new factor of world historical significance that can no longer be ignored by any sober-minded politician.

What is more, the time has come to interpret this great phenomenon of today which represents a mode of global evolution in modern-day society's way of thinking. It is this issue which is dealt with, in particular, in the book by Anatoly Gromyko and Vladimir Lomeiko *A New Way of Thinking in the Nuclear Age*, recently published in Moscow. The book is written with a sense of responsibility and on the basis of first-hand knowledge. The authors have managed to rise to the level of generalization drawing on the spontaneous upsurge of public protest against the nuclear threat. In doing this, they have remained realists, clearly aware of the whole brutal reality of the nuclear missile race, exposed the inhumanity of the manipulation of public opinion by apologists of militarism and imperialism and developed their ideas through direct dialogue, discussions with opponents, the comparison of doctrines and theses and through the use of facts and their own first-hand evidence.

We are sailing the ocean of the 20th century, an ocean of alarm, hope and doubt, in search of a new shore. That shore is in sight. It is crowded with people. That shore is the birth of a new human spirit, a new historical morality, and a new global humanism, the main principle of which is not merely "thou shalt not kill," but thou shalt not think in terms of killing for the sake of universal security and the self-preservation of generations. Far from the standpoint of reason, there cannot be any political objectives and tasks today for the sake of which anyone could permit himself to be the first to resort to a nuclear strike. The Soviet Union has given its pledge to humanity not to be the first to use nuclear weapons. So, if someone attempts to resort to nuclear blackmail for political ends or, say, to revive the mood of revanchism in order to review present national borders so dearly paid for by the victims of World War II, or attempts to scare a part of mankind with different views, such actions are both criminal and extremely dangerous. They could start a chain reaction that might result in all-out nuclear carnage on this earth. Such are the conditions of life at this

stage on our planet. They have taken shape not as a result of whim, but as the only possible form of mutual survival, and we must, at the very least, adapt ourselves to them.

The new way of thinking in the atomic age is the outcome of thoughts on life, observations and the analysis of international reality in its geopolitical aspect. Moreover, it is worth noting that the ideas of socialism are not separate within this way of thinking, but are considered in their interrelation, and along with modern history as a whole, with all its inherent upsurges, troubles and complexities. At the same time, this way of thinking manifestly confirms the fact that socialism is, by its very nature, one of the fundamental factors conditioning, by virtue of its proclaimed principle of the peaceful coexistence of different political systems, the transition from a "corporate" bloc-type consciousness to a global view of the unity of life on earth, and to a global way of thinking in the face of the growing nuclear threat to the existence of all peoples.

Reason is our hope. For the achievement of the intellect to be practically realized, a special effort is required by people and nations, namely, the conscious, organized will to search for universally significant guidelines for contemporary human development and moral laws and criteria aimed at understanding mankind's place in the "nuclear" world and comprehending the new level of mankind's role and purpose in the forthcoming epoch.

It seems to me that the idea of a world New Year 2000 celebration could serve as a generally acceptable basis for all peace-loving forces, all countries, all trends and currents, including religious ones, to work out major, international measures of a global, peace-promoting nature with serious humanitarian and cultural significance for present and future generations. Preparing for a Year 2000 celebration as a triumph of humanist ideals, as a historical jubilee in the history of human culture, and as a review of the achievements of world civilization and a transition to the third millennium A.D., could become a quest, be the answer to a question we often ask ourselves: "*As we reach the start of the third millennium, what will humanity possess in the social, cultural and scientific and technological spheres, and which of our achievements are worth taking with us as a source of further progress and happiness for humanity in times to come?*"

Ultimately, given the organized will of all peoples, this

idea could serve as a way out, one of the global ways out of the deadlock throughout the world in which reason has found itself under nuclear siege.

As we look into the future from the standpoint of the new thinking that has emerged in the nuclear age, we can and must say to ourselves both for today and tomorrow:

"No missiles and no space weapons by the year 2000.

"Prosperity to every home in the year 2000..."

1985

KNEELING TO WEEP, ARISE IN ANGER!

Everything in the world is relative, but far from everything can be compared. This thought comes to me whenever I think about Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This is why.

The only information we have about the universal deluge, the great planetary calamity on earth which is confirmed indirectly by modern scientific data, comes to us only from the biblical legend of Noah's Ark. Such enormous natural catastrophes—earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and typhoons—that took countless numbers of lives and caused colossal destruction in the past (and will no doubt, in the future) eventually recede into the background of history, gradually enter the realm of legends or are forgotten completely in good time.

That is the sensible essence of human memory—everything that emanates from nature, sooner or later can be explained, everything that stems from nature, one way or another, leads to the inevitable acceptance. Nature, after all, is not accountable to man.

Evil perpetrated by people themselves is measured in an altogether different way. Here the laws of human relations come into play. Human tragedies caused by other human beings are unfortunately ever increasing in scale and in form—they are tragedies brought about by violence and aggression. These tragedies intrude into life itself, into peoples' lives, into the awareness of peoples like deliberate and harmful actions that wreck the foundations of personal and collective existence, like phenomena that seem to be multiplying in geometrical progression furthering human calamity when violence breeds a chain of violence, when evil triggers a chain of evil like a vendetta, when the ever growing annihilation of human lives threatens the very possibility of reproduction, when the best thinkers in all ages advocate desperately in unison to turn the other cheek in futile hope of stopping the revelry of brutal instincts and put forth, despite the thunder of condemnation and abuse, the teaching of

nonviolence, one that always seems illogical and is always unacceptable to their contemporaries. This has happened more than once and more than twice; history is my witness.

But even so human reason is capable of forgetting so much in the interests of the future, to break the lethal chain of violence, choke the smoldering flames in the hearth of biases for the sake of preserving peace, flames that at any time can turn into a big fire difficult to extinguish. This also has happened more than once and more than twice; history is also my witness.

However a fundamental change has been introduced even into this situation that has developed in the course of the protracted and torturous quest of the human spirit. This new element can lead to irreversible consequences reducing to naught all of society's previous experience in surviving ceaseless conflicts and military clashes of past eras.

Nuclear war, capable of overshadowing the most imaginative notions of the apocalyptic horrors of the end of the world, has already opened its world account. It has placed the human race before a dilemma—to be or not to be on that fateful day, August 6, 1945.

Forty years. On this anniversary we appeal today to ourselves because there is no one else to appeal to but all people on the continents and islands of the planet Earth. Listen and look everyone! Where shall we head and how do we get there?

The calendar of history is telling us it is the anniversary of the most sinister and criminal event in the history of wars between states and peoples—the fortieth anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The attack was executed for the purpose of the mass annihilation of the civilians in those densely populated Japanese cities when in a matter of seconds hundreds of thousands of human lives vanished into the raging flame of atomic explosions reminiscent of the primary chaos of the Universe. People affected by the lethal radiation continued to die in horrible agony years later. It has been forty years since the atomic bombing. And all these forty years humankind, shaken by it all, is still condemning the criminals responsible for atomic policy. As time goes by we see all the more clearly how unfounded were the arguments for that policy put forth by the then government of the United States in its efforts to whitewash the fact that the atomic strike was senseless. Forty years have

passed, but hearts have not been pacified; we will continue in our condemnations as long as future generations feel the need to remember, to warn against and defend life from the obsessed reactionaries around the world and the imperialists who are always hostile to the concept of good, this being their antihumane essence.

In those years, because of the efforts of the world public and especially the mass media, we have obtained clear and indisputable proof about the preparations for and the execution of the world's first atomic bombing. But one aspect of this matter which we must not forget, I would call it the successive aspect of the crime, as paradoxical as it may seem, is that what the leaders of the Nazi Reich were simply physically incapable of accomplishing during World War II, after making every effort to create and use atomic weapons, the American imperialists were able to pull off without any hesitation, without blinking. Thus they crossed over the deadly and forbidden line, in my considered opinion, in the very foundation of the origin of reason. By dropping the atomic bomb they opened up the chasm of complete license. Even in wartime there are certain limits, there is some consideration of mercy for human lives as creatures of the same human roots. There is such a thing as the generosity and mercy of the victors over the defeated, a practice that has always been cultivated by all peoples. The American strategists did not even exercise such elementary restraint, although they knew very well that World War II was practically over and the days of Japanese militarism were numbered. People of the twentieth century continue to wonder just why the US found it so necessary to use atomic revenge against the civilians of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

And if we are recalling Hiroshima and Nagasaki today it is because this is the fervent creativity of history, history which creates from images of the past our memory and the convictions we need today in order to see tomorrow. That is why it is so important for us to understand what Hiroshima means to us today. We increasingly realize and should understand that Hiroshima was more than mystical evil, more than irrational revenge or the uncontrollable impulse of a destructive and aggressive superiority, and more than a pathological urge to kill every thing possible. Hiroshima was part of a diabolic calculation where the victims of the atomic bombing were only an indirect goal to reach another, far-reaching geopolitical

goal. The ultimate goal of those who then had a monopoly on atomic weapons, who made such a brutal decision, was to instill universal fear in sovereign nations and regions, in humankind as a whole, to use atomic blackmail to impose their total military and spiritual domination over the whole world and primarily societies with other social systems. According to a cold-blooded and thoroughly calculated military and psychological plan, hundreds of thousands of people who had nothing to do with military operations were doomed to be burned and slaughtered atomic victims. The most dangerous thing about this monstrous action is that it was a planned and calculated experiment of a long-term geopolitical nature.

This circumstance, this strike on Hiroshima and Nagasaki that was part of an imperial doctrine must be understood today by literally everyone no matter how far away they are from politics so that we are all united in our antinuclear thinking the same way as we all breathe air. This must be understood because any passionate and powerful tenet is impotent against cold calculation. There is only one almighty opponent to such cruel pragmatism—the global reason of humankind emanating from the overwhelming majority of the planet's population, reason as the unity of sober far-sightedness and goodness. Humanism is strong only when it is insightful, organized and purposeful, when it understands that the root of the problem is not the maniacs and irrational social forces and interests. Who stood to gain from the atomic annihilation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and who stands to gain from the generation of nuclear tensions today? This is the question that humanism has to answer precisely if what it wants is not simply to frighten and console the public, but to save humankind from nuclear extinction.

These are the questions we should pose for all to hear without reservation—who stands to gain from balancing on the brink of a holocaust so much that they outbalance both natural fear and what is left of conscience? Who can count on maintaining and even strengthening their world positions after such a war? We must pass judgment today against such opponents of the peaceful coexistence of peoples and countries. We know who they are—primarily the US military industrial complex and everything connected with it. If we are unable, having formed a single planetary opinion, to assert our opinion as the main factor of modern history, to condemn the war criminals

today, given that we are the majority, we may not have that option tomorrow.

In this respect Hiroshima and Nagasaki serve as a powerful and terrible lesson.

It has been forty years since then. The American bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki opened the door to the subsequent nuclear arms race, brought unforgettable tragedy affecting not only the Japanese people. It was a tragedy universal in nature, hurling modern society into the era of escalating nuclear preparations and menaces that could lead to the destruction of all life on earth distorting the very meaning of human civilization when the essence of the existence of a nation or state is seen by the military-industrial complex in terms of who can stockpile more, who can more quickly deploy ever new nuclear weapons in every accessible sphere—on land, in the air and in the water. And now these forces, blinded by the idea of unilateral superiority over other social systems, primarily the Soviet Union which is consistently and openly supporting the idea of peace, are planning the ultimate in universal evil—the deployment of nuclear weapons in outer space.

Should we be preparing such a world filled with lethal weapons and stockpiles for future generations that will come of age around the turn of the millennium?

Should human reason be serving such self-destructive goals—this vital concentration of eternity that has accumulated thousands of years of history and evolution, our past, present and future? After all, we are what we remember and what we await...

It has been forty years since people first used atomic weapons against other human beings. The infinitely sad tale of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the most sorrowful cities of the twentieth century, should serve for all people living today on the planet's continents and islands as a warning, a mournful reminder and a global confession...

We keep coming to the only possible conclusion that stems from all the complexities, problems and contradictions of world reality, from the bitter experience of the past and hopes for the future, that the absolute imperative of modern humankind, ruling out any other choice for life on earth, is to rid our lives completely and forever of nuclear weapons so that not even the shadow of these destructive superweapons, like the sword of Damocles, will ever hang over our heads in any environment, in any country and in any part of the planet.

This is our common salvation, our common destiny, our common joy of existence on earth.

Weeping and feeling compassion, we kneel down before the ashes of those murdered en masse by the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but then we arise in anger. In our eyes is the righteous flame of rancor—we condemn evil and those who commit evil; we do this in honor of the past and with faith in the future. Hiroshima—never again!

1985

WE SAID WHAT WE THOUGHT

It truly was a unique meeting of people in literature and art worldwide, of intellectuals from various countries. It has become known as the Issyk Kul Forum. My friends and I had nurtured this idea for a long time. We wanted to bring together people of kindred spirit and thought in a homey environment for informal discussions, individuals similar mainly in terms of their views on the role and purpose of art and literature in the contemporary world. Since we did not want to gather at some official event, of which there are enough as it is, I invited these close friends of mine to my home in Kirghizia as my personal guests. When we met in the suburbs of Frunze, Ala Archa, and began comparing thoughts, sharing our problems, concerns and hopes we realized just how long such a gathering had been needed, not only for us but I assume for everyone concerned about the things that relate directly to all peoples regardless of their status in the world.

We began putting our heads together. We had long been ready to pour out our hearts. Since we were not restricted to any planned topics and were free to say what we thought, it turned out to be a free-wheeling conversation among intellectuals with similar interests. Some of the participants were public leaders of very high caliber. They know a lot and have a great deal of foresight. Among them were the Tofflers—major American philosophers. Listening to them was instructive. Naturally the same thing can be said about Alexander King, President of the Club of Rome. As for literature and art, Arthur Miller, James Baldwin and Claude Simon attempted to cover all aspects of modern fiction. Since it is necessary now to develop new thinking to deal with the complex contradictions and global problems that have arisen, they said that this is a cause that literature and art are meant to serve. Aesthetitians and ethicians should take the lead in this new approach, vision of the world

and ultimately the new way of thinking.

The most important event for us was, of course, our meeting with Mikhail Gorbachev. It lasted nearly three hours. Frankly I thought at first that it would merely be a courtesy visit for all those involved. I had no idea we would raise our banners and talk about everything that bothered us. But I was wrong. Each one of us told the General Secretary what we thought about the modern world and modern culture, what we had articulated or were trying to articulate at our Issyk Kul Forum. We discussed all these things again and in a more concentrated form with Mikhail Gorbachev. It was essentially another round table discussion, only this time with the General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee. And although each person was, I would say, a serious figure, in the end Mikhail Gorbachev was able to distinguish the differences in opinion, see what the individuals shared in common and provide an integral explanation. It was a complex, interesting and profound conversation. It made a tremendous impression.

The thrust of the Issyk Kul Forum was to counter the very idea of war in people's minds potentially to feel that war is unacceptable. This is what we strive for and urge the same approach among our colleagues in art and literature.

We assert that human life has absolute value in the same way that civilization in general has absolute value. As far as we know there are no other civilizations in the Universe. What we have achieved, what our civilization possesses—culture, technology, etc.—has absolute value. It is our duty to safeguard what humankind has developed over the millennia.

The question is—how will the Issyk Kul Forum influence others? Mainly by correspondence among ourselves. We vowed that each of us would call on any other of the fifteen participants on any matter, personal and, of course, whatever concerns the public. These letters can be made public anywhere in the world whenever and wherever we feel it necessary. In this way we can influence public opinion.

The Issyk Kul Forum will periodically meet in one or another country. At the suggestion of Peter Ustinov we are planning the next gathering in Geneva. But there is already a waiting list of those who want to invite us to their countries. Among them is the Hungarian sculptor Varga. He was not at our forum but sent a letter of

greetings. The Turkish writer Yashar Kemal has invited us to Istanbul. Another member of the forum—scholar, poet, and diplomat, Federico Mayor—insists that after Geneva we come to Granada, Spain. In short, we already have a full schedule of trips, meetings and gatherings.

1986

STATEMENT OF THE ISSYK KUL FORUM

There are less than 5,000 days left until the end of the century and the beginning of the next millennium. Crises of a global nature and unprecedented complexity threaten the future of the human race. Undoubtedly, other more difficult problems will arise that cannot be solved by individual countries and which will require completely new approaches.

Today, coming up against such serious problems, people feel desperate. That is why we, creative people—writers, artists and scholars—have come here to lake Issyk Kul in Kirghizia in order to state for all to hear our faith in human genius and its creative powers.

Since the world is changing very rapidly, and traditional institutions are becoming outmoded, all of us should be involved in seeking new solutions to our common problems. Creativity has enabled humankind to survive for many millennia in this world burdened with misfortunes, wars and catastrophes. That is why it is extremely important for the next century to not only be the Century of the Planet, but also the Century of Creativity. Survival and happiness through creativity—this is our answer to the serious dangers and threats to our world so burdened with problems. In the past, just as in the present, human progress was often impeded by unwillingness to see and admit the real state of affairs. Genuine wisdom is finding in oneself sufficient imagination, courage and insight, and doing today consciously what we will have to do tomorrow of necessity. And therefore we should not only extrapolate the present into the future, but also creatively take part in its formation. This will require new, nonlinear thinking, imagination, profound understanding of the essence of problems and new far-sighted initiatives. Our future will never be the same as it was in the past. Only those of us who are capable of seeing what is concealed can also accomplish the impossible. That means we must have freedom to create, to spread

and teach new ways of thinking that dictate a diversified approach and the ability to perceive what is new.

New ideas should extend to all areas of our life, including politics, creating in this way a new way of thinking in every country. The future should not depend only on decisions made by politicians and on confrontations between individual world powers. An enormous role is to be played by human genius, the strength of the imagination of talented people, the initiatives and discoveries of people in the sciences, the dreams of poets and the hopes of ordinary people. Only all this put together can help sow the seeds of new thinking—general and political.

We know that the leaders of countries who bear the main burden of responsibility are doing everything possible to reach an agreement about the future of humankind. We all hope that they will find in themselves enough wisdom, inspiration and faith necessary to lay the way to a future world acceptable to all of humankind.

That is precisely why we accepted Chinghiz Aitmatov's very timely invitation and came here to Kirghizia, to the shores of Issyk Kul surrounded by the magnificent Tien Shan Mountains.

We hope that the seeds sown by us at Issyk Kul will yield strong shoots and that many representatives of the creative community around the world will join us in our endeavors to build the new world of our dreams.

1986

Chinghiz Aitmatov with Kirghiz villagers

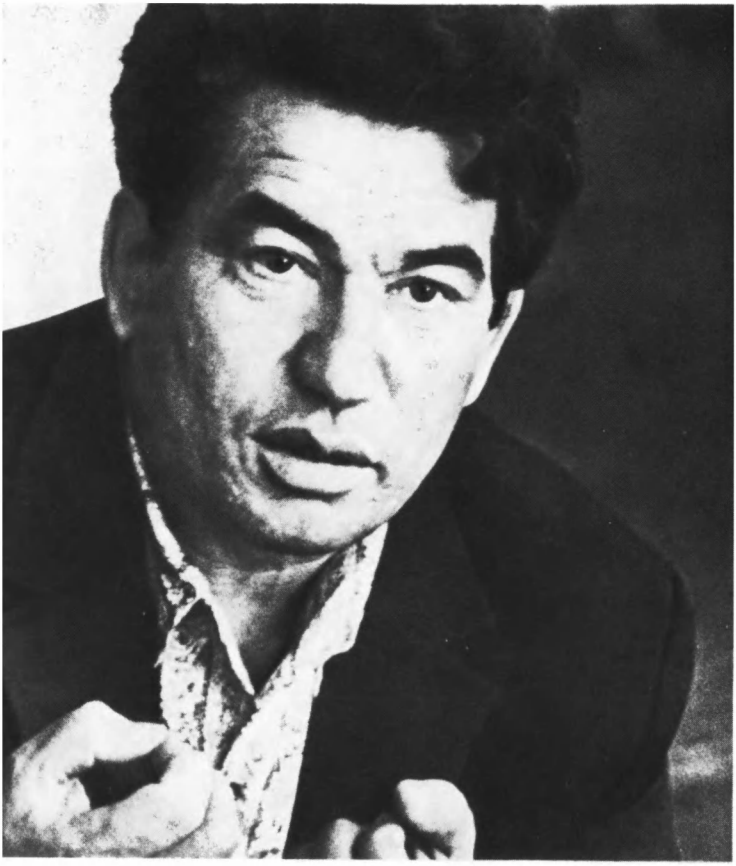
The writer talking to Sayakbai Karalaev, narrator of the Kirghiz *Manas* Epos

In his native village

Talking to readers

At the Toktogul Hydroelectric Power Station

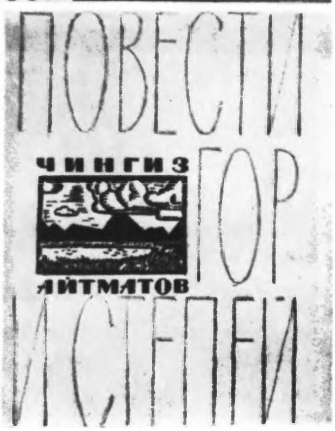
Aitmatov and Konstantin Simonov at the 23rd Congress of the CPSU in 1966



With Turkmenian writers, Berdy Kerbabaev (right) and K. Seitliev

Talking to James Aldridge (left), Leonid Leonov and Olzhas Suleimenov (Kazakhstan) after the 5th Congress of the Soviet Writers' Union

The 1970s



The cover of the author's first collection of short stories—*Tales of the Mountains and Steppes*

Chinghiz Aitmatov and Leonid Leonov at the 7th Congress of the Soviet Writers' Union in 1981

Konstantin Simonov and Chinghiz Aitmatov

Aitmatov, Garif Akhunov (Tataria) and Lyubomir Levchev (Bulgaria)

Alexander Chakovsky (left), Aitmatov and Vladimir Tendriakov

At the 8th Congress of the Soviet Writers' Union in 1986.
Oles Gonchar (right)

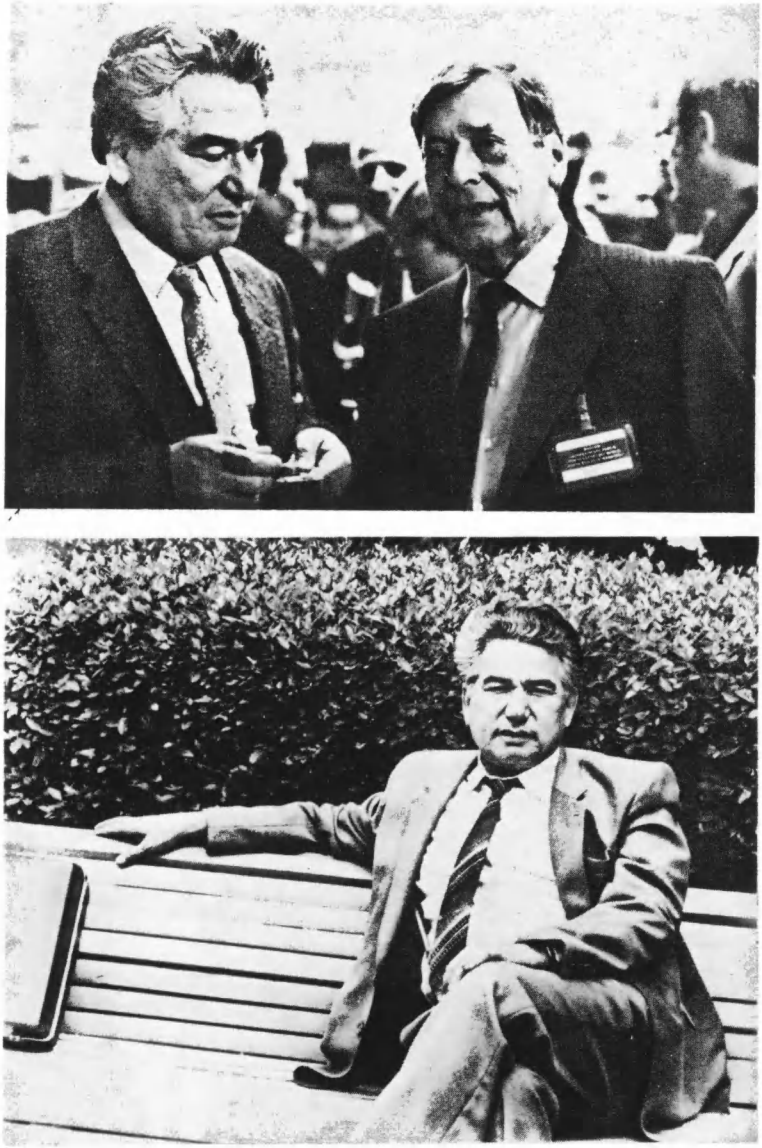
Participants in the Issyk Kul Forum in 1986.

Lake Issyk Kul

Writers can always find a common language.

With Academician Dmitry Likhachev

At the forum entitled "For a Nuclear-Free World, for Humankind's Survival" held in 1987. Claus Maria Brandauer (Austria, left)



Chinghiz Aitmatov and Bernt Engelman (Federal Republic of Germany)

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1. posthumously exonerated
2. acronym for the Extraordinary Committee to Combat Counterrevolution
3. a novel by Soviet writer Valentin Kataev (1897-1986)
4. a novel by Soviet writer Mikhail Bubenkov (1909-1983)

Snow on Manas Mountain. *Ogonyok*, No. 19, 1975

1. *The Cranes Fly Early* (1975) was based on this material

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Much Depends on You... *Komsomolets Kirgizii*, January 20, 1968.

1. written in 1956
2. the Vietnam war (1964-1973)

A Point of Contact. *Voprosy literatury*, No. 8, 1976.

1. published in 1963
2. published in 1958
3. published in 1960
4. published in 1970
5. published in 1965
6. a Kirghiz epos about the heroic deeds of Manas, his son and grandson defending their land
7. adopted at the 24th Congress of the CPSU held March 30-April 9, 1971
8. a play by Aitmatov and Kazakh playwright Kaltai Mukhamedjanov
9. All-Union State Institute of Cinematography in Moscow founded in 1919
10. hero of *After the Fairy Tale (The White Ship)*
11. hero of *Farewell, Gyulsary!*
12. hero of *And Quiet Flows the Don* (1928-1940) by Mikhail Sholokhov (1905-1984)
13. hero of *The Idiot* (1868) by Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881)

Man and the World. The Seventies. *Novy mir*, No. 12, 1977

1. see *A Point of Contact*
2. Chief Director of the Sovremennik Theater in Moscow
3. actor, former Chief Director of the Sovremennik Theater; presently dean of the acting school under the Moscow Art Theater and head of the acting school-theater on Chaplygin Street in Moscow

The Time to Speak Out. *The Echo of Peace*, Pravda Publishing House, 1985

1. cited from *How Human Life Begins* by Sharon Begley and John Carey in *Newsweek*, January 11, 1982, p. 36; excerpt printed in *Za rubezhom*, No. 14, 1982
2. published in 1981
3. from a poem by Sergei Yesenin (1895-1925) *Gradually We Are Now Departing* (1924)
4. the title of a poem by Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893-1930)
5. from a poem by Soviet Kalmyk poet David Kugultinov (b. 1922)
6. a book about the 1917 socialist revolution in Russia by the American writer and journalist John Reed (1887-1920) who participated in those events
7. from a poem by Vladimir Mayakovsky *To Comrade Nette—Steamer and Man* (1926)
8. Russian literary critic, journalist, revolutionary democrat, materialist philosopher
9. after the title of a short story by Soviet writer Andrei Platonov (1899-1951)
10. from *Poem in Prose* by Ivan Turgenev (1818-1883)
11. from Vladimir Mayakovsky's *To Our Young Generation* (1927)
12. from *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* (1790) by the Russian thinker and writer Alexander Radishchev (1749-1802)

A Joy to Live on Earth. *Izvestia*, March 16, 1984

1. published in 1977
2. published in 1962

The Price Is Life. *Literaturnaya gazeta*, August 13, 1986

1. hero from Dostoyevsky's *The Karamazov Brothers* (1880)
2. reference to a novel by Mikhail Bulgakov (1891-1940) *The Master and Margarita*

To Be An Echo of the World. *Voprosy literatury*, No. 3, 1986

The article is based on Aitmatov's presentation in October

1985 at the Sofia meeting of the European Academy of Science, Art and Literature.

I Believe in Man. *Pravda*, February 14, 1987

Guide of Conscience. *Literaturny Kirgizstan*, No. 2, 1964
The article is based on a speech the writer gave in the Bolshoi Theater at the commemoration of the 400th anniversary of William Shakespeare's birth

Our Gorky. *Gorky i literatura narodov*. Gosuniversitet Publishing House, Yerevan, 1970

He Knew a Million Lines of the Manas Tale. *Sovietskaya Kirgizia*, May 12, 1971
1. Civil War in Russia (1918-1920). The workers and peasants led by the Communist Party defended the gains of the 1917 socialist revolution against domestic counterrevolution and foreign intervention.
2. Soviet Kazakh writer (1897-1961)

Relentless Realism. *Pravda*, November 11, 1971
The article was timed for the 150th anniversary of Dostoyevsky's birth.

I Bow My Head. *Literaturnaya gazeta*, December 22, 1971
In Memory of Soviet poet Alexander Tvardovsky (1910-1971)

A Word About Pushkin. *Pravda*, February 11, 1987

Byelorussian Brother. *Literaturnaya gazeta*, June 26, 1974
The article was written for the 50th birthday of the Byelorussian writer Vasily Bykov

Portrait of an Artist. *Sovietskaya muzyka*, No. 9, 1976
1. (1905-1973), director of *The Overcoat* (1926), *Hamlet* (1964), *King Lear* (1971), and other films
2. (b. 1925) Soviet actor, played Hamlet in Kozintsev's film
3. (b. 1918) Soviet composer, Academician of the Azerbaijanian Academy of Sciences

His Field Is Enormous. *Izvestia*, July 8, 1975

The Cranes Are Flying. *Literaturnaya gazeta*, April 21, 1976

The Land and Bird of Inspiration. *Pravda*, September 18, 1984
1. (1803/1804-1869), Russian writer and music critic, the author of romantic and philosophical-fantasy novels

Winds Washing the Land. An abridged version of Aitmatov's article in the *Literaturnaya gazeta*, August 22, 1973

1. capital of Kazakhstan, one of the USSR's 15 republics
2. the quarterly literary journal of the Permanent Council of the Association of Asian and African Writers, published in English, Arabic and French since 1968

There Is No Alternative to the Spirit of Helsinki. *Literaturnaya gazeta*, June 22, 1977

The article is based on Aitmatov's presentation in Sofia at the international writers' forum "The Writer and Peace: the Spirit of Helsinki and the Duty of Masters of Culture"

Meeting Above the Planet Earth. *Literaturnaya gazeta*, July 23, 1975

1. in July 1975 there was an experimental flight of the American Apollo spaceship (Thomas Stafford, Donald Slayton, Vance Brand) and the Soviet Soyuz spaceship (Alexei Leonov, Valery Kubasov); the ships docked twice, the crews carried out joint research and technical experiments, and visited each other's quarters

Not Coexisting Means Not Existing. *Literaturnaya gazeta*, January 13, 1982

Tearing Down the Smokescreen of Biases. An abridged version of Aitmatov's article in *Sovietskaya kultura*, May 21, 1982

Reaching the Hearts of People. *Literaturnaya gazeta*, September 21, 1983 (abridged)

1. (b. 1911), Pakistani poet, public figure, recipient of the International Lenin Peace Prize (1962)

The Epos of Victory. *Izvestia*, May 6, 1985

Reason Under Nuclear Siege. *Pravda*, February 4, 1985

Kneeling to Weep, Arise in Anger! *Izvestia*, August 6, 1985

We Said What We Thought. Statement of the Issyk-Kul Forum. *Nedelya*, November 3-9, 1986

Aitmatov's thoughts about the Issyk-Kul Forum, the meeting of writers and artists from all over the world held in October 1986 in Frunze at Aitmatov's invitation

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